

Turning Points in American History

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A popular public speaker, Professor O'Donnell has delivered more than 100 invited talks and conducted more than 2,000 walking tours through New York City's ethnic neighborhoods such as Chinatown, Little Italy, and Harlem. He fulfilled a personal goal by running the Boston Marathon in 2005. ■

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Turning Points in American History

Scope:

Have you ever wondered how history really happens? Is it predetermined and inevitable or full of surprises? Does history progress by gradual evolution, or can a single person or event change its direction forever? In this course, we take a lively tour of American history to explore these questions.

American history has been shaped by many long-term trends and subtle forces; however, it has also taken sudden, dramatic turns as a result of key events. Some of these events, such as the Boston Tea Party in 1773, are well known, while others, like the eradication of hookworm starting in 1909, are not ordinarily thought of as major moments in U.S. history. Among the 48 events discussed in this course, some are big and some small, some obscure and some famous, but each of them changed America's social, economic, and political character. Throughout our journey, we also study what constitutes a turning point and why some events fade in significance over time.

In some circumstances, a turning point marks the success of a social movement, as in the case of women's suffrage or the civil rights movement. Sometimes a turning point is a decisive battle, as in the case of the Battle of Saratoga during the American Revolution or the Battle of Antietam during the Civil War. Other times, a turning point involves the development of new technology, as in the case of the telegraph and the launching of the communication revolution or the personal computer and the dawning of the digital age. Still others involve the establishment of a fundamental ideal, as in the case of Roger Williams's institution of religious toleration as a core American value in 1636. The impact of a turning point is sometimes immediate—for example, emancipation—and sometimes the full impact is only realized over time, as in the case of the Industrial Revolution.

No matter what forms they take, we can see turning points in history wherever a society makes a break with its past and enters a new phase of development. In other words, turning points mark decisive before-and-

after moments in history. Take Shays’s Rebellion, for example. Before this 1786 event, Americans lived under the Articles of Confederation. After the rebellion and the Constitutional Convention it inspired, Americans lived under a new federal government and enjoyed the protections articulated in the Bill of Rights. Put another way, America became a very different place after this pivotal event.

This course on turning points also introduces you to a series of recurring themes that will broaden and deepen your understanding of U.S. history. For example, it emphasizes the theme of history as the study of surprises. Few people in any historical era are prepared for a major event that will radically alter their lives, whether it’s a war, an epidemic, a revolution, or an invention. Who, 20 years ago, could have expected the astonishing impact of the personal computer on everyday life in America?

It also stresses the importance of agency. History is made by towering figures like George Washington and John D. Rockefeller, but it’s also made by many nameless and faceless people—slaves, workers, farmers, suffragists—who take matters into their own hands and achieve historical change. The civil rights movement, for example, didn’t achieve great success simply because President Lyndon Johnson signed landmark legislation in the mid-1960s; it did so because thousands of people organized and plotted, marched and protested, testified and voted, took police batons to the head and served jail time until Congress responded.

This course also focuses on the theme of conflict in history. Sometimes this conflict involves violence, riots, and war, but often it stems from ideas. Many of the turning points examined in this course emanate from conflicting visions on controversial issues. Was slavery compatible with republican values? Would giving women the right to vote destroy the American family?

Finally, this course looks at history as the study of choices. Nothing in history is inevitable. At any given moment, historical change is driven by the choices made by people. It’s not driven by some mysterious inevitability. Looking at historical events as inevitable removes both the drama and the morality from history. This theme presents itself over and over again in this course, from the decision of the Continental Congress to declare American

independence in 1776 to President Harry S. Truman's decision to drop two atomic bombs on Japan in 1945.

This course on turning points takes a fresh and unique look at American history. The events we discuss are sometimes triumphant and inspiring and at other times tragic and sobering, but in every case, they will expand and illuminate your knowledge of the extraordinary story of the American past. ■

1617 The Great Epidemic

Lecture 1

When French explorer Samuel de Champlain traveled along the New England coast in 1605, he found good harbors, open land, and navigable rivers. But he also found natives who were both numerous and opposed to permanent European settlement. Yet when the *Mayflower* arrived 15 years later, they found the land sparsely populated. The reason? A deadly epidemic, probably brought by shipwrecked French sailors in 1617. While devastating to the Indians, the epidemic paved the way for European colonization along the east coast of North America.

To make sense of the Great Epidemic of 1617, we need to review a few hundred million years of history—or rather, geology. Continental drift created separate habitats in Europe, Africa, Asia, Oceania, and North and South America. In those terms, Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the Caribbean in 1492 is a recent event.

Old World humans brought useful things to the New World, like horses and wheat, but they also brought diseases that the natives of North and South America had no immunities to. Historians call this transfer the Columbian Exchange, and it radically altered human history. Scholars still debate how many American natives died from disease brought by the Columbian Exchange, but estimates range from two-thirds to nine-tenths of the population—somewhere between 45 and 90 million people.

What triggered the epidemic of 1617? Indians in New England had traded with Europeans for a century before 1620 but had grown wary of these strangers, who were prone to kidnapping and enslaving the locals. So in 1615, when a French ship wrecked near a Wampanoag village, the natives killed most of the sailors but kept three or four as slaves. One of these French captives had a disease—probably typhus or plague—that the Wampanoags had never encountered before.

Whatever the disease, historians estimate that 90 percent of the population from Connecticut to Maine was wiped out. Thomas Morton wrote of the area

around Boston that so many had died so suddenly, countless bodies were left unburied. The woods were so full of bones and skulls that it seemed to him “a newfound Golgotha.”

The epidemic affected European colonization in three major ways. First, it changed the natives’ attitudes toward Europeans. Previously confident and slightly hostile, the native tribes were now terrified of the Europeans and their god, who could wreak such terrible vengeance. During the Pilgrims’ first winter in Plymouth, for example, half of the colony died; the survivors were weak from malnutrition, exhaustion, and exposure. Yet the remaining Wampanoags assisted the colonists, rather than attacking them. Like the Indians, the Puritans interpreted the epidemic in religious terms. John Winthrop later described the epidemics as “miraculous,” a sign that God looked on their colony with special favor. This sense of providence has pervaded Americans’ image of themselves to this day.

Second, the epidemic (and many smaller ones that followed) also weakened the native population and removed a major obstacle to British colonization.



Samuel Champlain’s explorations of the northeast coast of North America brought him into contact—and almost immediate conflict—with the natives.

About 50 years after the epidemic, during King Philip's War (discussed in Lecture 5), the Native Americans nearly drove the Europeans out of New England. Had the epidemic not thinned the native population, the British might not have prevailed.

Finally, the British pursued colonization on the cheap; the Pilgrims and other waves of settlers were usually underfunded and unprepared for the conditions in the New World. In New England, the natives had done all the hard work of clearing land and establishing farms, then conveniently disappeared. All the Pilgrims had to do was cut down the weeds and start planting. Without this boon, colonization would have proceeded much more slowly, if at all.

Eventually, as European Americans spread out across the American continent in the 1700s and 1800s, they carried biological devastation to unsuspecting Native Americans all the way to California, repeating the cycle.

The Great Epidemic of 1617 clearly fits the definition of a historical turning point: a moment when a society's historical trajectory is sent in a significantly new direction. The epidemic also fits several of the major themes we will find throughout this course:

- History is often the study of **surprises**. Few people in any historical era are prepared for what's coming, be it a war, an epidemic, a revolution, or an invention.
- History in many ways is the study of **conflict**—not just violence but conflicting ideas.
- History is made by those who take **agency**—that is, they take matters into their own hands.
- **Crises** often mean opportunities, when what was unthinkable becomes possible.
- Events almost always have **causes**, plural, not a single cause.

- At any given moment in history, change is driven by **choices** made by people, not by some mysterious force. ■

Suggested Reading

Hopkins, *The Greatest Killer*.

Mann, *1491*.

Questions to Consider

1. How might British colonization have proceeded differently had epidemics not devastated Native American populations?
2. How did providentialism, or the idea that God was on their side, shape the outlook and actions of British colonists?

1617 The Great Epidemic

Lecture 1—Transcript

Hello, and welcome to this, our first lecture examining key turning points in American history. Let's begin with a mystery. In 1605 the great French explorer, Samuel de Champlain, was busily exploring the east coast of what later became New England. He was looking for possible places to establish a French colony. In the course of his journey, he saw many promising things—deep harbors, thick forests, abundant wildlife. But there one aspect of the region that troubled him: its huge Native American population. Now, these natives were perfectly willing to trade with Europeans, but they were adamantly opposed to Europeans setting up permanent settlements. Champlain discovered this fact at Nauset Bay on Cape Cod, which is now part of Massachusetts. Local natives, members of the local Wampanoag tribe, attacked a party of Champlain's men that he had sent ashore. Apparently they feared that the Europeans were about to set up some sort of a colony, or some kind of a settlement. Champlain decided that it was impractical—if not impossible—to establish a French colony there. So Champlain left, and he went back to France. He told the French government: We need to look elsewhere. But then, just 15 years later, in 1620, a group of English religious dissenters—we know them as the Pilgrims—arrived at the coast of Massachusetts, very close to where Champlain's men had been attacked. There the pilgrims found a large, abandoned Indian settlement—but no Indians in sight. So the Pilgrims named it Plymouth, and set about began building their settlement. These two very different experiences raise a very compelling question: What happened to all the Indians?

Well, but before we solve this mystery, let's establish some objectives for this lecture. First, we'll look at what caused the dramatic reduction in the size of this previously thriving Native American community in New England. Next, we'll examine the larger impact of this incident on British colonization in North America. Finally, we'll take some time as we look ahead to our upcoming series of lectures to think about what exactly constitutes a turning point in history.

So let's begin by looking at what caused the disappearance of so many Native Americans in New England before the Puritans arrived in 1620.

What happened? Well, to make sense of this mystery, we need review a few hundred million years of history. Just kidding! In all seriousness, we do need to go back a bit in time—about 120 million years ago—very briefly. That’s when the continents were all one large landmass. It was at that point, 120 million years ago, that this single landmass began to separate. We call this “continental drift.” Over time this created separate habitats in Europe, Africa, Asia, Oceania, and North and South America. Then only a short time ago—short if we think in terms of millions of years—human beings began to change this pattern. Explorers like Vasco de Gama, Ferdinand Magellan, and Christopher Columbus began to explore the globe. They were searching for opportunities to make money, to increase the power of their home countries, and also to spread Christianity. And as these people encountered the western hemisphere, what they came to call the “New World,” these men of the “Old World” changed the course of human history.

They did this in some very obvious ways—by introducing Christianity, for example. They also did it by imposing their rule on the native peoples in the New World. But they also did it in more subtle ways—at least ways that were subtle at first. What we are talking about here is the exchange of things between the Old World and the New World. What kind of things? Europeans brought all manner of useful stuff to the New World. They brought horses, cows, pigs, sheep, goats (I’ve run out of fingers), chickens, honeybees, seeds for crops like wheat, rice, barley, citrus fruits. These things were utterly unknown in the New World, so when they were introduced by Europeans and gradually spread, they had a profound impact. Just think about the impact of the horse—there are no horses in the New World until Europeans bring horses, and obviously that’s going to play a big role in their ability to conquer a lot of native peoples.

Move the clock forward a few hundred years. The horse will eventually become part of the environment. Native Americans—particularly Native Americans on the Great Plains—will adopt the horse, and they’ll go from being Indians that typically lived in settled villages and only moved in small patterns, to Native Americans who could mount horses and follow the great herds of buffalo up and down the Great Plains. So when Americans eventually begin moving into the American West, they encounter these

incredible horsemen. Those incredible horsemen had only recently, relatively speaking, acquired the horse.

Eventually, Europeans found things in the New World that they liked, and they brought them back to Europe. These included things like potatoes, corn, squash, pumpkins, tomatoes, peppers, peanuts, sunflowers, tobacco, turkeys, guinea pigs—all of these are New World products they brought back to the Old World.

This transfer of products between Old World and New World is known by historians as the “Columbian Exchange,” and it radically altered human history. Thus far, we’ve only noted one aspect of this exchange; we’ve only talked about the good stuff. Unfortunately, the Columbian Exchange included the transfer of some bad stuff—some really bad stuff. Europeans, for example, brought weeds, rats, and insects from the Old World to the New World, and that’s going to obviously change the landscape and environment.

Something much more devastating was part of this package, and that was disease. The diseases that Europeans brought from Europe to the New World would have a devastating impact. The native peoples in Western hemisphere had no immunities to any of the European diseases that they were about to bring over, diseases like cholera, typhus, smallpox, and plague—they had no immunities. Now why didn’t they have immunities to these diseases? This is one of the great mysteries in history, and scholars are still working to answer this question, but the leading answers are that Europeans lived in dense settlements, they lived in cities; they were a heavily urbanized people, meaning they lived in close proximity to each other. Disease spread quickly among them. Europeans also domesticated a wide range of animals: pigs, goats, cows, and chickens. Most of these diseases that I mentioned a few moments ago originate with, or at the very least are helped spread by, livestock. So, over 1000s of years of living in dense communities and living amongst domesticated animals, Europeans developed immunities to these diseases. Now of course, lots of people were killed by these diseases, but most people survived and they developed resistance to them, so that most people could weather the periodic epidemics.

By contrast, the native peoples in the Americas were, for the most part, not urban; they didn't live in densely packed settlements in close proximity to lots of other people. And the native peoples of the Americas did not domesticate large animals. (And there's a good reason for that: There were no large animals in the New World). So this meant that Indians in the New World were uniquely vulnerable to these diseases brought by Europeans. They basically had no exposure to them. So when Europeans began arriving after 1492, it led to the devastation of millions—not with guns, not with swords, and not with cannons, but rather with diseases brought completely by accident. It was a “conquest by an arsenal of diseases.” That's the phrase the historian Alfred Crosby used—he's the man who also coined the phrase “Columbian Exchange.”

So how many Native Americans died in this process? Scholars still debate the numbers, but most agree that the number lies somewhere between two-thirds to nine-tenths of the original pre-1492 population. That's the number that were decimated by this Columbian Exchange. That's in terms of percentages, but how does that play out in terms of numbers? What were the actual numbers of people? Again, it's about estimates. Experts estimate that the population of indigenous peoples of the New World before Columbus arrived ranged somewhere between 50 and 100 million people. This means that the European diseases that traveled across the Atlantic killed 45 to 90 million people—a pretty staggering number when you think about it.

With this foray into science and medicine complete, let's steer this story back to the Pilgrims in North America in 1620. By now you can probably guess why the Pilgrims, when they arrived in 1620, found so few Native Americans: The answer is they had been wiped out by an epidemic. But how? What triggered this epidemic? As we noted in the introduction to this lecture when talking about Champlain's experiences off of Massachusetts, the Indians of New England had traded with Europeans for at least a century before 1620. Mostly, these Europeans were fisherman that were just passing on through, so the trade was, relatively speaking, small-scale. They involved the exchange of pelts, fur, and food in exchange for European knives, kettles, and other kinds of tools. But over time, particularly towards the 1600s, the Native Americans of the east coast of what would become the United States grew increasingly wary of these Europeans, and they had really good reason

to increasingly wary because the Europeans began to take Native Americans as slaves, and sell them into slave economies throughout the New World.

There are many examples of this. In 1611, an English explorer named Edward Harlow seized six Indians captives off the coast of Massachusetts and he brought them back to England. To pay for the cost of his voyage, he put one of these Indians on display—circus-style—and charged admission. In 1614, another English explorer seized about two dozen Indian captives and then brought them to Spain and sold them into slavery. Significantly, one of these captives was named Squanto. That name might ring a bell for some of you, and that’s because Squanto will later make an incredible escape from slavery in Spain back to the New World, and eventually back to his homeland in New England. Well, this practice of kidnapping and enslaving explains why the Indians that Champlain encountered in 1605 were so hostile when his men came ashore.

So this was the context in 1615, when a French ship wrecked off the coast of Massachusetts, somewhere along Cape Cod. Most of the crew were killed in this shipwreck; there were some people that survived. The local Wampanoag Indians, who had seen many of their people kidnapped by the Europeans in recent years, killed all the survivors except for four men, and these men they turned into slaves. One of the captured Frenchmen, according to later accounts, warned the Indians. He said to them, “[His] God was angry with them for their wickedness, and would destroy them, and give their country to another people, that should not live as beasts as they did but should be clothed.” Apparently, according to the accounts, when the Wampanoags heard this, they laughed at him—they laughed at this threat. They said “We’re too numerous for your God to wipe us out.” Apparently the Frenchman responded rather ominously, “God has many ways to destroy them that they knew not.” This prediction of god destroying them would play a key role in both how Native Americans and Pilgrims interpreted this Great Epidemic that’s just about to strike.

The Great Epidemic was caused by a disease carried by one of these French captives—or all of them. It was a disease the Wampanoags had never encountered. Scholars think it probably typhus or plague, it might have been smallpox or tuberculosis; any of those diseases would have done it.

The ensuing epidemic started sometime maybe late-1616, but really took hold in 1617 and raged for two years. It was absolutely devastating. How devastating? Well, we have some accounts from traders, Pilgrims, and Natives about the degree of devastation from this epidemic. It basically suggests that about 90 percent of the population of southern New England was wiped out. We get a sense of this devastation from a vivid account recorded by a captain named Thomas Dermer. He traveled from Maine to Massachusetts in 1619. Incidentally, his guide on this voyage was Squanto, who we mentioned earlier; he's the Indian captured back in 1614 and sold as a slave in Spain. By now he's already made his escape back to New England. When Dermer and Squanto arrive at Squanto's homeland, they found, according to Dermer's account, "ancient plantations, not long since populous, now utterly void; in other places a remnant remains, but not free of sickness."

Another account of devastation was recorded two years later in 1621, this time by a party of Pilgrims who were out exploring the area about 15 miles from Plymouth. They found in their wanderings abandoned villages—many abandoned villages—and also overgrown cornfields that were created by the Native Americans. One of these travelers recorded in his journal: "Thousands of men have lived there, which died in a great plague not long since." Near Boston, man named Thomas Morton wrote that so many Natives had died, and died so suddenly, that many bodies were left unburied, and as a result, the surrounding woods were filled with "[so many bones and skulls] that as I traveled in that forest, ... it seemed to me a newfound Golgotha." How's that for a grisly image? The Bible tells us that Golgotha was the place where Jesus was crucified and that it meant "place of the skull." So we can see that the Great Epidemic of 1617 cleared the land of many Native Americans just before the Europeans arrived with the intention of establishing permanent settlements. They would benefit immensely from the fact that Native Americans had done a lot of the the hard work before they got there. They cleared the land. They established thriving farms. All the Pilgrims had to do was cut down the weeds and start planting.

Another impact of the epidemic: the surviving Native Americans were terrified of the Europeans and the Europeans' God. This is really significant because during the first winter of 1620–1621 (the first winter the Pilgrims

are in the New World), half of them died—died of malnutrition, exhaustion, and exposure. The remaining Wampanoag Indians, even after the epidemic, still outnumbered them 2 to 1. The Wampanoags could easily have wiped out the settlement and made Plymouth one of the “lost colonies,” like Roanoke Island. And yet that winter, no attack came. Why not? Apparently, the Wampanoags feared the wrath of the white man’s God. They believed this God had sent the plague to wipe them out.

One visitor to Plymouth in 1621, a man named Robert Cushman, observed the effect of the epidemic on the Natives. He wrote that it seemed to sap them of their courage. He said, “Their countenance is dejected, and they seem as a people affrighted [even though they] might in one hour have made a dispatch of us, yet such a fear was upon them, . . . that they never offered us the least injury in word or deed.” This fear, plus the threat from a powerful tribe to the south (the Narragansetts who apparently had escaped a lot of the effects of the epidemic), prompted the Wampanoag leader, a man named Massasoit, to make peace with the Pilgrims in the spring of 1621. After that, the Wampanoags then helped the Pilgrims to survive, helped them find sources of food, to learn how to plant corn, and so forth. That’s why they were invited to the First Thanksgiving in the fall of 1621. As you can see, that’s a considerably more complicated version of the First Thanksgiving story than we’re used to hearing. A couple of lectures down the road, it will get even more complicated.

Now, it’s really important to point out that the Indians were not the only ones who interpreted the epidemic in religious terms. The Pilgrims saw the hand God behind it. It appeared to them that God had answered their prayers and prepared for them, Old Testament-style, a promised land where they could start a new, righteous community of Christians. This idea was reinforced in the coming years as many more epidemics struck at the native population. These outbreaks sickened many Europeans, they killed a few Europeans, but they devastated the Indians.

John Winthrop, leader of the nearby Puritans colony established in Boston in 1630, described the epidemics as “miraculous.” To him, they were a sign that God looked with favor upon their special colony. Let’s listen to what Winthrop says in a letter that he wrote to someone in 1634: “For the natives

in these parts, God hath so pursued them, as for 300 miles space the greatest part of them are swept away by the smallpox, which still continues among them. ... God hath cleared our title to this place.” Think of those words—“God hath cleared our title to this place.” He makes it sound like a great real estate transaction.

What’s the significance Great Epidemic of 1617? The Great Epidemic, and the smaller ones that followed, removed a major obstacle to British colonization. It meant that the British, in those precarious early years of colonization, faced a significantly weakened Native American population. Even then, as we shall see in a coming lecture, this weakened population nearly wiped out the English settlements in New England in King Philip’s War in 1675–1676. Now, why is this a big deal? Consider that Native Americans in New England had, by 1600, developed advanced societies with technologies that rivaled their European adversaries. They had also managed to drive off many attempts at colonization in the previous years. For example, in 1602, the British explorer Bartholomew Gosnold—he’s actually the man who named “Cape Cod”—he arrived in 1602 and established a fort and a trading post on a small island off the Massachusetts coast. But repeated attacks against his men led him to abandon the post.

There are many other examples of this, including the incident that we mentioned about Samuel de Champlain a little bit earlier. So before the Great Epidemic, the Indians of New England were a major force to be reckoned with. Let’s consider another important fact: The British pursued colonization in the New World “on the cheap.” What do I mean by this? Compare this to the Spanish. When the Spanish colonized, they threw all of their might behind it—they sent in the military, they sent a complete fleet of government officials, they sent an established church. The British, when they colonized, just simply encouraged private groups like religious dissenters (the Pilgrims and the Puritans) or economic risk-takers (like the people who went to Jamestown in Virginia) and said, essentially, “Good luck. You have our blessing.” These groups did not have the backing of the mighty British Army, so as a result, the Great Epidemic made their chances of survival that much easier.

Now, with these things in mind, let's listen to Karen Kupperman. She's a historian of America, and she ponders one of the great "what ifs" in early American history. This really gets to the core of the impact of this role of disease in history.

One can only speculate what the outcome of the rivalry [between Indians and Europeans] would have been if the impact of European diseases on the Native American population had not been so devastating. If colonists had not been able to occupy lands already cleared by Indian farmers who had vanished, colonization would have proceeded much more slowly. If Indian culture had not been devastated by the physical assaults it had suffered, colonization might not have proceeded at all.

Think about that notion. Colonization might not have proceeded at all were it not for this great epidemic.

This question would hang over not just British colonization of New England in the 1600s, but the subsequent growth and development of the United States over the next two and a half centuries. For as Euro-Americans spread out across the American continent in the 1700s and in the 1800s, they unwittingly carried biological devastation to unsuspecting Native Americans all the way to California.

It should be clear by now that the Great Epidemic of 1617 marked an important turning point in early American history. It both facilitated British colonization and imparted to that enterprise, a providentialism, the notion that somehow this was part of God's plan. This was an idea that would shape America's sense of itself right up to the present day.

At this point, in our remaining time, let's look ahead to the upcoming series of lectures. What exactly constitutes a turning point? Let's start with a working definition of a "turning point." A turning point is a moment when a society's historical trajectory is sent in a significantly new direction. In other words, a turning point marks the beginning of a new historical reality. Turning points, as we'll see, come in many forms.

In some circumstances, a turning point marks the success of a social movement. Women's suffrage, for example, took 72 years from the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls in 1848 to the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920. Sometimes a turning point is a decisive battle, as in the case of the Battle of Saratoga during the American Revolution or the Battle of Antietam during the Civil War. Other times, a turning point involves the development of new technology. The invention of the telegraph, for example, in the 1840s launched what historians call the communications revolution; in the 1970s the personal computer launched the digital age. Still other turning points involve the establishment of a fundamental ideal. We'll see this in the case of Roger Williams in the 1630s: He helped establish the principle of freedom of religion. In a similar way, a century later in the 1730s, a man named John Peter Zenger helped establish the idea of freedom of the press. The impact of a turning point is sometimes immediate—you know it's happened right away. We saw this with the example of the Great Epidemic of 1617 and we'll also see this in other turning point lectures, including the assassination of President McKinley in 1901.

No matter what form it takes, we can see turning points in history wherever society makes a break with its past and enters a new phase of development. In other words, a turning point marks a decisive “before and after” moment in history. Let's take an example. Before Shays's Rebellion, Americans lived under the Articles of Confederation; after Shays's Rebellion and the Constitutional Convention that it inspired, Americans lived under a new federal government, and enjoyed the protections articulated in the Bill of Rights. Let's put this a different way, America became a very different place after Shays's Rebellion.

Now that we've defined a turning point, let's wrap up this first lecture with a few historical themes that we'll see come up repeatedly over the course of the next 47 lectures.

Let's start with something I always point out to my students: surprises. I always like to say that history is the study of surprises. Few people in any historical era are prepared for what's coming next, what's right around the corner, whether it's a war, an epidemic, a revolution, or a breakthrough

invention. Who could have guessed the impact of the personal computer when it first was rolled out in the 1970s?

Another theme: conflict. History, in many ways, is the study of conflict. By this I don't mean the usual kinds of conflict (violence, riots, war). It's also often the study of the conflict of ideas. In American history we see this all the time, and it's going to be a steady theme throughout our lectures. For example, was slavery compatible with Republican values? That question is going to be a major conflict of ideas, conflict of visions throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Another one: Would giving women the right to vote destroy the American family? That question was really at the heart of the women's suffrage debate.

Another theme: agency. History is often made by towering figures like George Washington or John D. Rockefeller, but history is also made by the many, many nameless and faceless, whether they're slaves, factory workers, farmers, or suffragists—people who take agency. What that simply means is they take matters into their own hands to achieve historical change. They set a goal and take steps to reach it. Let's take one example: the civil rights movement. The civil rights movement did not achieve great things simply because President Lyndon Johnson signed landmark legislation in the mid-1960s; it achieved great things because thousands of people organized and protested, marched and plotted, testified and voted, took police batons in the head, and served time in jail until finally Congress responded.

Another historical theme: crisis—or more precisely, crisis leads to opportunity. History is full of examples where a terrible crisis leads to sudden and radical change, where the unthinkable suddenly becomes possible. A great example of this is during the Great Depression—the crisis of the Great Depression. The worst economic meltdown in American history led to the New Deal, which was a series of programs that would never have been passed by Congress in the 1920s or in any other decade leading up to that; they were simply just unthinkable ideas. But the crisis of the Great Depression leads people to think again, and to accept some pretty radical change. We saw this during the Civil War. The Civil War was a great national crisis, and in the midst of the great national crisis, what happens?

The unthinkable occurs: Lincoln signs the Emancipation Proclamation, ending slavery.

Another theme is causes. Notice how I used the plural; that's because it's rare that something occurs in history as the result of a single factor, a single decision, or a single trend. Take for one example, a topic of an upcoming lecture: The Spanish-American War. As we'll see, there were many different reasons for America's entry into that war, not just one single reason.

And finally: choices. I always say history is the study of choices. By that I mean nothing is inevitable. At any given moment in history, change is driven by choices made by people. It's not driven some mysterious force out there in the atmosphere called "inevitability." If we look at historical events as inevitable, we remove the drama of history, and we also remove the morality of history. And we'll see this theme over and over again in the course of these lectures: the decision of the Continental Congress, for example, to declare American Independence—that's a big choice; the decision of President Truman to drop the atomic bomb in 1945—another big choice. And there were lots of other options in both cases.

Well, as you can see, we've set a very ambitious agenda for this course on turning points in American history. In our next lecture, we'll look at one of the great and troubling questions in American history: How and why did America become a slaveholding society? Until then, that's all for now.

1619 Land of the Free? Slavery Begins

Lecture 2

Slavery, the darkest chapter in American history, began with two dozen African slaves brought to Virginia in 1619. While the initial trade was quite small, the development of tobacco as a cash crop eventually created an insatiable demand for labor. By 1680, the slave population of Virginia was 3,000. Twenty years later, it topped 13,000. Slavery certainly boosted the American colonial economy, but it also saddled the emerging nation with a problem that would only be resolved during the Civil War.

On July 30, 1619, the first representative government in the Americas met in a church in Jamestown, Virginia. It was called the House of Burgesses, and it established the principle of representative government in British North America. Yet a few weeks later, in August 1619, a ship carrying two dozen enslaved African men, women, and children arrived at Jamestown. American democracy and American slavery were born in the same town less than a month apart.

Jamestown, founded in 1607 by the private Virginia Company, was the first permanent British colony in North America. It flourished in its early years, but in 1611, John Rolfe planted the first successful Virginia tobacco crop. By 1624, Virginia had shipped 200,000 pounds of tobacco to England. Now Virginia's problem was a shortage of labor.

The first Africans to arrive in Virginia had been captured by the Portuguese in the kingdom of Ndongo (now in Angola), then stolen by British pirates. These captives likely all spoke the same language (or dialects of the same language); many were also literate and were probably Christian, as Ndongo had been converted in 1490.

In the historical record, when people are referred to as slaves, it isn't clear exactly what that meant. Jamestown's colonial records contain no laws regarding slavery before 1660. Ample evidence suggests many of these early Africans were treated much like white indentured servants; that is,

they were held as laborers for a term of service, then granted freedom. Some went on, just like liberated white indentured servants, to acquire

Permanent, hereditary, chattel slavery on a mass scale in America occurred because of a choice to impose on people of African ancestry the status of enslaved people.

land, plant tobacco, and own slaves themselves. Slavery as we think of it took time to evolve; permanent, hereditary, chattel slavery on a mass scale in America occurred because of a choice to impose on people of African ancestry the status of enslaved people.

The colonies' transformation from a society with slaves into slave society began in the 1660s with a sudden spike in the black population and major changes in Virginia law:

- In 1662, children born to an enslaved mother were declared slaves.
- In 1667, the law declared that baptism no longer freed a slave.
- In 1669, killing one's own slaves could not be considered murder.
- In 1670, laws declared that free blacks could not own white indentured servants and that all non-Christian slaves were slaves for life.

Among the many reasons for this shift was the growing problem of rebellion among white indentured labor. The key event was Bacon's Rebellion (1675–1676). Nathaniel Bacon, an English planter angered by high taxes and Indian attacks, formed a small army of poor whites (free and indentured) and poor blacks (free and enslaved). They began by attacking Indians; then, when the governor declared Bacon and his men rebels and traitors, they turned on Jamestown.

When Bacon died unexpectedly in October 1676, the rebellion fizzled, and Virginia's landholders breathed a sigh of relief. But the only lesson they took from the uprising was that white indentured servitude was too risky. To offset

the greater cost of slavery, they passed laws tightening the legal definition of slavery, making it permanent and hereditary—and a good investment.

Slavery grew rapidly thereafter: There were 3,000 enslaved persons in the Chesapeake region in 1680; by 1700, there were 16,000. By 1775, there were 210,000. Meanwhile, beginning in the 1690s, many Chesapeake residents moved into the Carolinas and brought their slaves. By 1708, slaves made up 65 percent of South Carolina's population.

The North was no haven of freedom, either; Massachusetts was the first colony to legally recognize slavery in 1641. New York City was the key arrival point for slaves from the 1650s until 1750. But slavery never became prominent in the North because the economy was built on small family farms, not large plantations, and the economics of slavery didn't make sense.

By the first U.S. census in 1790, the population was 3.9 million, including 757,000 slaves—about one in five people. ■

Suggested Reading

Hashaw, *The Birth of Black America*.

Kolchin, *American Slavery*.



The Teaching Company Collection.

Nathaniel Bacon's army was formidable enough to seize and burn Jamestown.

Questions to Consider

1. Why is it significant that slavery as an institution evolved slowly?
2. Which factor was more important in the development of slavery, racism or greed?

1619 Land of the Free? Slavery Begins

Lecture 2—Transcript

Welcome back. Let's begin this lecture in 1619 in Virginia, on July 30, 1619, to be precise. On that day the first representative government in the Americas met in a church in Jamestown, Virginia. It was called The House of Burgesses. It was a 22-member body that included the colonial governor, a council of six men that he appointed, and 15 members elected by adult landowners of the colony. Now, the House of Burgesses had very limited powers. It only met once a year, and the governor could veto any laws that they passed. Nonetheless, the founding of the House of Burgesses in 1619 established the principle of representative government that would grow in popularity and practice in British North America for the next century and a half. And that's why Virginia can legitimately claim the title as the birthplace of American democracy.

And yet, just six weeks after the landmark event in the story of American freedom, these same Virginians played a central role in establishing an institution that mocked America's commitment to freedom—human slavery. Because in August 1619 a ship carrying two dozen enslaved African men, women, and children arrived at Jamestown, and they were immediately sold. Thus were American democracy and American slavery born only a month apart in Jamestown, Virginia. This great American paradox, that America evolved as a society dedicated to liberty and to slavery, would persist for another two and a half centuries and be resolved only in the American Civil War. So today we turn our attention to one of the most fateful turning points in all of American history—the origins of slavery.

Now before we get started, let's lay out some objectives for this lecture. We're basically going to focus on four things. First, we'll look at the origins the Jamestown colony. Then we'll move on to talk about how the institution of slavery was begun there and how it evolved slowly. Then we'll explore what led to slavery's dramatic expansion in the late 1600s. Finally we'll examine how the slavery spread throughout the colonies in the 18th century. Before we get started, let's establish some broad ideas to think about regarding the history of slavery. First of all, slavery is not a "chapter" in American history, it's a central element that runs through all of American history, even long

after emancipation. Secondly, think about it, slavery was established in 1619 and then abolished in 1865. This means that America was a slaveholding society for 246 years. This fact raises an interesting question. Think about this. What year will America hit its 246th year as a society free of slavery? 2111! Now that makes you think, doesn't it? Consider this point as well. In 1800, just a few years after the American Revolution, America was the largest slaveholding society in the world. With these things in mind that we look at the origins of the Jamestown colony.

Jamestown was founded 1607 by a private company called the Virginia Company. It was the first permanent British colony in North America. But in its early years the colony absolutely floundered. Listen to these numbers. In its early years, between 1607 and 1609, 900 settlers arrived in the colony, and only 60 survived. Most simply starved or died of disease. And it didn't stop at that point. Many thousands more would perish over the next decade. Between 1610 and 1622, 9,000 immigrants will come to the Jamestown colony, and only 2,000 will survive. Think of those odds. Only 2,000 out of 9,000 survived. To make matters worse, as far as the investors in the Virginia Company. were concerned, the colony was economically a failure. It failed to produce any kind of valuable product that would earn a profit for the Virginia Company. Just a few years after the colony was founded it was in serious danger of bankruptcy and failure.

But then in 1611, a man named John Rolfe, yes that John Rolfe, the one who married Pocahontas, planted a successful crop of tobacco. Tobacco from the West Indies had already been growing in popularity among British noblemen since the 1590s. And Rolfe thought he saw an opportunity to enter this profitable market to see if tobacco would grow in Virginia and if it would be good enough to sell at a profit in Europe. He was right. Tobacco soon took off. By 1624, 200,000 pounds of tobacco were shipped out of Jamestown to England. Suddenly, the failed colony at Jamestown began to boom. In 1638, just a few years later, three million pounds were exported out of Jamestown. And this fact led one historian to quip many years later that "Virginia was built on smoke." The only worrisome issue facing the colony (I shouldn't say the only one, but it was a serious issue the colony was facing at this time) was a labor shortage. For a time, Virginia was able to satisfy this labor problem to some degree with indentured servants. These are people that

sign a contract. They can't afford to get to America, so they sign up for a contract; somebody pays their way to Jamestown. And they usually came from England, from Ireland, or from Scotland. They would work for five or seven years to pay off that transportation debt. And they'd ideally get some land and start out on their own. This indentured servitude filled the need for a while. But once tobacco took off—tobacco cultivation is really labor intensive—the demand for labor also took off. So Jamestown faced a serious labor shortage.

Now let's examine the story of how the first African slaves arrived in Jamestown and how their status as chattel slaves evolved very, very slowly. These first slaves (the ones who arrived in 1619), came from Africa, directly from Africa. They were purchased by Portuguese traders in Angola, Southwest Africa. And they were intended for the New World. At this time, the Portuguese were the leaders in the international trade of slaves, taking slaves from Africa and delivering them to the plantation and mining economies in the New World. The slaves who ended up in Jamestown were among about 350 who were seized and placed on a Portuguese ship that was bound for Veracruz, which is a plantation economy in what is now modern-day Mexico. But out on the high seas, their ship was seized by two British pirate ships. When the pirates saw that this was a Portuguese ship, they thought they were going to get some gold, but slaves were very valuable. So each captain of these two pirate ships took about 20 to 30 slaves each and then headed off to the New World to sell them to make a profit. The rest of the human cargo was sent on to Veracruz.

The two ships, these two pirate ships, arrived in Jamestown just four days apart in 1619. John Rolfe, who we mentioned earlier, the guy who started planting tobacco, he actually wrote the first, or best-surviving, account of what exactly happened. He wrote an account for the Virginia Company in London. According to Rolfe, the ship that arrived in Jamestown in August of 1619 “brought not any thing but 20 and odd Negroes, which the Governor and [a] Cape Marchant bought for victuale [which means food supplies] . . . at the best and easyest rate they could.” The second ship arrived a couple days later and it also sold its human cargo. So the first enslaved people in America came from roughly the same region in Africa, spoke the same language, or probably the same dialects. Most of them were probably literate. And

all had probably even been baptized Christians, because they came from a kingdom that had been converted to Christianity back in 1490. Over the next few years, more ships would come to Jamestown bearing slaves in small numbers. And this would boost Jamestown's African population from about 23 in 1625 to over 300 in 1648.

Now this a good place to stop to clarify a couple of really important facts about slavery in 17th century America. The single most important thing to keep in mind is that slavery took time to evolve. I say this because we so often think of slavery in a very oversimplified manner. We imagine images of large gangs of enslaved men and women working on large plantations, often under the close watch of a white overseer. We further imagine slave society where slaves are permanently enslaved, that nearly everyone of African origin is enslaved, and only a few gain their freedom. And we further think of slavery as hereditary. We also think it's held in place by a series of very, very strict laws that restrict the movement of slave as a way to prevent escape and insurrection. Now, a system of slavery resembling this description could be found in the Chesapeake region by the early 1700s, but it took nearly a century to create.

Here's a second vital point about slavery that we need to keep in mind: In human terms, there's actually no such thing as a slave. Now what do I mean, no such thing? That's right. I'll explain what I'm talking about. These first Africans that arrived in 1619 were enslaved persons. Now this is not some "politically correct," feel-good linguistic distinction. It's a really critical point to keep in mind when trying to comprehend the evolution of slavery. When we speak of an "enslaved person" we are noting inescapable fact that slavery is a condition that is forced on an individual that has to be constantly maintained through force and through law. Otherwise, slavery disintegrates. Think about how slavery ultimately ends in America. It's caused, in large measure, the disruptions caused by the Civil War, which leads to the unraveling of slavery long before Abraham Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation. No individual, to conclude this point, can be transformed into a slave. They are simply enslaved and then held in slavery.

The case of these first Africans in Jamestown provides a clear example of this fact. Some of these men and women often were referred to, in legal

documents, as slaves, but the historical record is very unclear by what exactly that meant in terms of law and practice. Indeed, ample evidence suggests that many of these early Africans were treated pretty much like indentured servants; that is, they were held as laborers for a term of service and then granted their freedom.

The early records of Jamestown also indicate that a number early arriving Africans gained their freedom. Some went on to be liberated just like white indentured servants. We don't know how in every case, but we do know that Africans, in a few years, began to acquire land and, to do what everyone else is doing, to plant tobacco. Jamestown's colonial records before 1660 contain no specific laws regarding slavery. To illustrate this let's look at the remarkable story of a man named Anthony Johnson. He arrived in Jamestown in 1621 (just a couple years after the original Africans arrived), and he arrived as a slave, or some kind of bound laborer. We don't know. We also know that he only had one name, Antonio. He was purchased by the Bennett family and set to work growing tobacco on their plantation. From the records, it appears that the Bennetts actually took a liking to Antonio because they allowed him to start a small farm on the side to grow his own food but also maybe to sell some of that food. He also married a fellow slave named Mary. And they had four children and they were allowed to baptize their children.

By the 1630s, when we pick up the story of Antonio, he's gained his freedom and that of his family. He's Anglicized his name to Anthony Johnson. Anthony Johnson will prosper, just like many of the other farmers around him. In 1651 he gains a 250-acre farm—this is a very large one—as a reward from the Colonial government for sponsoring the migration of indentured servants. Think about that. A former slave getting a huge tract of land for importing and paying the cost of the indentured servants. One of Johnson's sons, named John, also was awarded a farm, this case a 550-acre farm under the same terms, for also sponsoring the migration of indenture servants. Another son, named Richard, soon acquired a farm of 100 acres.

So what does this mean? Well Johnson's success in gaining his freedom, gaining a piece of land, also allowed him to do what everybody else was doing or trying to do, which is to buy slaves. Now this may seem incomprehensible

to us, that Anthony Johnson, a former slave, would buy fellow Africans and hold them as slaves. But in the world of Anthony Johnson this actually made perfect sense. Slaves, like indentured servants, provided invaluable labor. And because slavery, in this period, had no precise legal definition, it's probably that Anthony Johnson thought his slaves would obtain freedom at some point just like he did. In fact we have records to show that one of his slaves, named Cesar, was allowed by Anthony Johnson to raise cattle and probably earned a little money that way, with the expectation of buying his freedom. In 1665 Anthony Johnson sold his farm, moved across the bay to Maryland, and there leased a 300-acre farm. And five years later, in the spring of 1670, Anthony Johnson died.

By 1670 the number of Africans in Virginia and Maryland was relatively small, still less than 2,000. But many of them lived in freedom. And in some of the settlements where they lived, about 20–30 percent of the black population were free. It seems clear that when we think about the story of Anthony Johnson and these original Africans that the society—we should note that the great American historian of slavery, Ira Berlin, calls them the “charter generation,” sort of initial generation in which a lot of the questions about their status would be sorted out. But these people, like Anthony Johnson, lived in a world where the line between freedom and slavery was, at the very least, a blurry one. At this point, the Chesapeake was, in Berlin’s words, a “society with slaves,” meaning there was only a small number. Later in the century, certainly by 1700, the Chesapeake region is transformed into what Berlin calls a “slave society,” where slavery is right at the core of its existence and the way the economy operated. Slavery, in other words, takes time to evolve. And this evolution didn’t have a “natural” or predictable outcome. One of the key concepts I always emphasize when talking about history is that history is the study of choices—nothing is ever inevitable. The establishment of permanent, hereditary, chattel slavery on a mass scale in America occurred because of the choices made by people in the Chesapeake. In the Chesapeake, decades after the first Africans arrived, a choice was made to impose upon the people of African ancestry the status of enslaved people.

So now let’s turn to another topic today, which is the dramatic expansion of slavery in the Chesapeake region in the late 1600s. How did this happen?

How did we go from a society with slaves to a slave society, as Berlin describes it. One factor was the sudden spike in the number of Africans living in the region. In 1671 there were 2,000 Africans. By 1680, just nine years later, the number there is 3,000. Another factor was the change in the law. In the 1660s we can see in the colonial records of Virginia and Maryland that many planters, especially the large and wealthy ones, took an increasingly negative view of freedoms enjoyed by Africans like Anthony Johnson. They began to slowly but surely to fashion a more restrictive form of slavery, one that was tied directly to skin color.

We see this in the many laws that began to appear statute books of Virginia and Maryland starting in the 1660s. In 1662 a Virginia law declared that children born to an enslaved mother would be considered slaves. Now this was to clarify because there was a lot of interracial marriages or relationships. And so if a white man and a black woman slave had a child this clarified that that child would be considered a slave. Five years later Virginia passed another law that declared that baptism was no longer a means to freedom. Up until that point many slaves, in converting to Christianity, were able to claim freedom. Well that's no longer going to be the case in the Chesapeake. In 1669 another Virginia law declared that a slave holder who killed his slave could not be charged with murder. The law read specifically as follows: "If any slave resists his master and, by the extremity of the correction, should chance to die, that his death not be not accounted a felony." And the reason there is, they argued, you couldn't actually murder a slave because a slave is property. It would make no sense to murder a slave and destroy your own property. In 1670 two more Virginia laws declared that free blacks could not own white indentured servants and that all non-Christian slaves that were now being brought into the colony were immediately made slaves for life.

Why this shift? Why this sudden creation of a slave code, and clarification, and putting up boundaries between white and black people living in the Chesapeake? Well there are a couple of reasons. One, whites had grown to resent the competition from these free African laborers. Secondly, Africans were uniquely vulnerable in this circumstance. Unlike white indenture servants, who can go back if they wish, back to England, or who can write letters home and tell people how terrible life is for them, who can also go to court and sue, Africans don't have these options. They're cut off completely

from their homeland. There's no communication, or very little if any, with Africa. So there's no penalty for the increasing exploitation that they face. White landowners realized that if they up the exploitation, there's not going to be a sudden decline in the number of African slaves as there was with white labor. Also, a third factor, after 1660, if we dare say it in those terms, a supply of slaves began to grow because the expansion of the international slave trade, which I will talk about more in a moment. A fourth factor was that white indentured labor had proven itself to be by 1660s and 1670s increasingly problematic for two reasons. There was not enough of it, not enough white labor coming over because too many of them were letting it be known that it's really not a good place to go. You're better off going to Pennsylvania or Massachusetts. And secondly, white indentured laborers proved to be rather rambunctious and rebellious, kind of a hard population to control while they were indentured servants and especially once they gained their freedom.

As a result slavery expands dramatically in Virginia in the late 1600s. In 1670 there were fewer than 2,000 slaves. In 1700, there were over 16,000. And the key event in this transformation is an event known as Bacon's Rebellion. It takes place in 1675–1676. It's led by a man named Nathaniel Bacon. Bacon was an English planter who had arrived recently to the Chesapeake. And he was very angry by his circumstances. He was angered by the high taxes that he had to pay and the fact that his outlying property, that was a little bit further away than Jamestown, was subject to Indian attacks because he lived out on the frontier. And he was furious with the Virginia government for not doing enough to stop these Indian attacks. So he took matters into his own hands. Bacon formed a small army of similarly angry men, poor whites, including free and indentured servants, and also poor blacks, including some who were free and some who were enslaved. And they began to attack the local Indian population. This turns Nathaniel Bacon into a frontier hero out on the frontier of Virginia, and he's quickly elected in the next election to the House of Burgesses. However, the governor of the colony, named Sir William Berkeley, had him arrested because these sort of freelanced attacks on the Indians. Berkeley grows a little nervous because he realizes how popular Bacon is, and he soon releases him. And he had good reason to be nervous because Bacon immediately headed back out to the countryside, reforms an army of angry men, and they march on Jamestown, and they

demand that Governor Berkeley grant a commission to Bacon and his men to continue their attacks against the Indians.

Well, Berkeley at this point has no choice and grants this wish. However, as soon as Bacon took off, he gathered his own small army of volunteers and issued a proclamation declaring that Bacon and his men were rebels and traitors—outlaws. Bacon then turned around and marches on back to Jamestown. He forced Governor Berkeley to flee, and then he set the town on fire. So at this point, Nathaniel Bacon and his motley army controlled the colony of Virginia. But matters changed suddenly in October of 1676 when Nathaniel Bacon suddenly died, and with that Bacon's Rebellion basically fizzled out.

In the aftermath of Bacon's Rebellion, however, the planter class of the Chesapeake region, first of all, breathed a huge sigh of relief. But they also realized that another uprising was possible given the circumstances in the colony. And the problem, as they saw it, was too many white indentured servants gaining their freedom. Because once they gained their freedom, they were usually given land. Where's that land? Way out on the frontier. It's subject to Indian attacks more frequently, subject to high taxes, and also it was very difficult to get their tobacco to market at any kind of reasonable rate because it's so far away. So this frontier population is very unstable and very angry, and another rebellion seemed possible at any moment. So the lesson drawn by the planter establishment in the wake of Bacon's Rebellion was that white indentured servitude was too risky. Now what are they going to do though, because they need labor? Where are they going to find some labor? It just so happened, as we mentioned earlier, the "solution" had appeared. The international slave trade had expanded dramatically in the late 1600s. Suddenly Virginia planters had access to a large source of African slaves.

Now, it's true: Slaves cost a lot more than indentured servants. But tobacco was incredibly profitable so maybe they could pay for it. Secondly, in the tightening legal definition of slavery, slavery was becoming increasingly more permanent, hereditary, and tightly controlled. So this meant slave labor was a good investment. It cost more. But you had the slaves for life. This turn to African slavery thus made economic sense, and it diminished the problem of angry white indentured servants.

Bacon's Rebellion, when thought of that way, we can see it as the culmination of the turning point that began in 1619. After 1676, after Bacon's Rebellion fizzled out, slave laws in the Chesapeake region became more and more restrictive, and they basically closed all the loopholes that existed, [and] wiped out all the grey areas between slave and free, white and black. Slavery, as a consequence, grew rapidly in this period: 3,000 slaves in the region in 1680; 16,000-plus in 1700; 30,000 (so you can see it's doubling every couple of decades) in 1730; 60,000 in 1740; and by 1775, the eve of the Revolution, the Chesapeake region has 210,000 slaves. So the Chesapeake, in Ira Berlin's famous phrase, becomes the very definition of a "slave society."

Now with our remaining time let's examine how slavery grew throughout the American colonies in 18th century. Beginning in the 1690s many Chesapeake residents moved south to the Carolinas. They were looking for more land. And they brought their slaves with them. The Carolinas also got a boost of new population from the Caribbean. Many settlers there, particularly the sons of planters, looking for large amounts of land arrived in the Carolinas. And they also brought slaves with them. And the chief crop in South Carolina is not going to be tobacco, it's going to be rice cultivation. The slave population in South Carolina soars. By 1708 the slave population outnumbers the white population in South Carolina. By 1720, there are 12,000 slaves in the colony, and that represents 65 percent of the colony's overall population. Two out of three people living in South Carolina are enslaved.

This isn't happening exactly the same way everywhere. In the case of Georgia, it reminds us of this issue, this theme that we mentioned about choices in history. Georgia was founded 1732, and in its charter it explicitly banned slavery. But as the nearby slave economies of South Carolina and Virginia and Maryland flourished, pressure began to mount on the Georgia government. And in 1751, just 19 years after Georgia was founded as an explicitly non-slave-holding colony, the government of Georgia rescinded its antislavery law. South Carolinians and their slaves and people from the Caribbean began to flood into the colony, and soon Georgia, like all the others, became a major slave-holding colony.

Now, what about the North? Slavery also spread to the North. In fact, the first colony to officially recognize slavery in law was Massachusetts in

1641. Connecticut followed soon thereafter in 1650 recognizing slavery. But for the most part, slavery was never prominent there. Now why is that? Is that because the people in the northern colonies were more moral than the people in the southern colonies? Hardly. Far from it. It really comes down to economics. Slavery is an economic arrangement, right? So in the North what was the typical economic arrangement? It was small family-centered farms. And it made no economic sense to buy slaves. Plus, if you needed extra labor, that's where most indentured servants were going. So you could buy indentured servants. So it just didn't make any economic sense. If we look at Massachusetts, in the early 18th century, by 1708 for example, there are 550 slaves in Massachusetts, which is actually a very small number comparatively to the southern colonies. And the slave population in Massachusetts never exceeds 3 percent of the total colonial population.

One northern colony, however, played a key role in the spread of American slavery. In the 1650s New York City, at that time called New Amsterdam, right, became it's a Dutch colony, became the key arrival point for slaves. By 1664 (that's the year that actually Amsterdam was taken over by the British and turned into New York) the slave population was 700, which represented 20 percent of the total population. And New York City remained the primary arrival point for slaves coming from Africa and the Caribbean until 1750. Only at that point did Charleston, South Carolina, become the primary importation port city in the Americas.

And so it went. Through importation and natural reproduction, the slave population grew rapidly in the 18th century. By the first United States census in 1790, the U.S. population came in at 3.9 million people. And this number, almost 4 million, including 757,000 slaves. That represents about 19 percent of America's population. One in five people in America was an enslaved African.

Clearly 1619 represents a major turning point in American history. That's where we got on that road to 1790. And then, as we will see in subsequent lectures, other chapters that involved slavery. Americans had in little more than 150 years established a country built upon the two contradictory developments that originated in 1619 Virginia. One was representative government; the other was slavery. Historian Edmund Morgan, another great

scholar of slavery, calls this “the American paradox, the marriage of slavery and freedom.” Well, as we’ll see, it would take several generations and one very bloody Civil War—itsself, another great turning point in American history—to ultimately resolve this paradox.

In our next lecture, we’ll explore another turning point in American history—the origins of America’s tradition as a “nation of immigrants.”

Thank you.

1636 Freedom of Worship—Roger Williams

Lecture 3

Expelled by the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay, Roger Williams founded the new colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations as a haven for religious dissenters. In so doing, he established the principle of religious pluralism, an idea that grew in popularity over the next 150 years and was eventually enshrined in the First Amendment.

While the Puritans came to America in search of the freedom to worship as they saw fit, they were not so willing to extend this freedom to others. For example, Mary Dyer, a Boston Quaker, was hanged on Boston Common on June 1, 1660, for preaching her beliefs. This was the orthodox world in which Roger Williams spoke the heresy of religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

Puritanism had begun as a separatist movement but transformed into a reform one. In Governor John Winthrop's words, the Puritans wanted to build a "city upon a hill," a shining Christian utopia that showed the people of England their sinful state. In such a utopia, there was no room for dissent or heresy.

Roger Williams was a London-born, Cambridge-educated Anglican Nonconformist who immigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1631 in search of like-minded souls and settled in Plymouth. At first, the Puritans welcomed him, but soon they found his views too radical, particularly his respect for the Indians and his view that political authority should be separate from religious authority: The former should have jurisdiction over crimes such as blasphemy, the latter over murder, theft, and so forth.

In 1635, Williams was tried, convicted of sedition and heresy, and banished from Plymouth. He fled south and sheltered with the natives for a time, then bought the land around Narragansett Bay from them and founded the city of Providence. Its original citizens—himself, his wife, and a dozen other adults and their families—signed agreements to obey "all such orders as shall be made for the public good ... by the major assent of the present inhabitants ...

only in civil things” and pledged to uphold “liberty of conscience.” People of all faiths were welcome in Providence, including Catholics and Jews.

Providence prospered, and in 1663 Williams obtained a charter from King Charles II for the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. The charter specified that “no person within the said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be in any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question, for any differences of opinion in matters of religion.” The very next year, New Jersey’s charter declared no one would be “molested, punished, disquieted or called in question” for any matter of religion. In 1665, the Carolina charter used nearly identical language. In 1681, William Penn founded Pennsylvania as a haven for persecuted Quakers and people of all faiths.



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The Pilgrims who arrived at Plymouth and founded colonies in Massachusetts were separatists who evolved into strict and intolerant reformers.

Williams died in 1683, but his ideas kept spreading, even back to England. John Locke, the English philosopher who had such a huge influence on America's Founding Fathers, wrote in his 1689 *Letter Concerning Toleration*, "I regard it as necessary above all to distinguish between the business of civil government and that of religion."

In the aftermath of the American Revolution, the colonies-turned-states debated the issue of religious tolerance when constructing their own constitutions. In the 1785, Patrick Henry submitted a bill to the Virginia legislature to establish Christianity as the commonwealth's official religion. In response, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison wrote *A Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments*:

Torrents of blood have been spilt in the old world, by vain attempts of the secular arm, to extinguish religious discord, by proscribing all difference in religious opinion. Time has at length revealed the true remedy. . . . Relaxation of narrow and rigorous policy.

Henry's bill was defeated, and in 1786 Virginia passed Thomas Jefferson's Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom. One year later, the Constitutional Convention declared that "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any public office or public trust under the United States." In 1791, the Bill of Rights was adopted, including the First Amendment, which in part states "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Over time, every state would eliminate its established churches; Massachusetts was the last, in 1833.

The long-term effects of Roger Williams's ideas were an explosion of religious diversity in America and ongoing battles over religious freedom. The First Amendment did not solve all the challenges of a maintaining religious pluralism, but it narrowed the scope of the argument. Williams's—and eventually the United States'—example has spread of the ideal of religious freedom worldwide. ■

Suggested Reading

Gaustad, *Roger Williams*.

Waldman, *Founding Faith*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why was the separation of church and state considered such a radical idea, even a century and a half after Roger Williams established his colony?
2. How has the principle of religious toleration contributed to the uniqueness of American society?

1636 Freedom of Worship—Roger Williams

Lecture 3—Transcript

Welcome back. It's time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Today we examine a somewhat forgotten story from the early days of the American colonization. It's the story of one man, Roger Williams, and his efforts to establish a fundamental American value: freedom of religion.

As always, let's start with a story: Mary Dyer was a deeply religious woman who migrated to the Puritan colony of Massachusetts Bay in 1635. There she soon fell in with Anne Hutchinson, a woman with, let's just say, certain religious views that the authorities in Massachusetts Bay eventually deemed heretical. Hutchinson was soon banished to Rhode Island and Dyer followed her there. Then in 1650, Mary Dyer returned to England where she became a Quaker. Seven years later in 1657 she came back to Massachusetts. Then over the next three years she was hauled before the colony's court and charged with preaching Quakerism, which to Massachusetts authorities was heresy. It had to be stopped. But Dyer refused to stop preaching and talking about Quakerism. And so on June 1, 1660, she was hanged on the Boston Common.

I start with this brief and rather grim story of the banishment of Anne Hutchinson and the execution of Mary Dyer to illustrate the intensely orthodox world in which another religious dissenter, Roger Williams, dared to speak the heresy of religious liberty, or what we call "freedom of conscience." Now, let's jump ahead 279 years to 1939. That year President Franklin Roosevelt delivered his famous "Four Freedoms" speech. It celebrated the Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear. You've probably all seen the Norman Rockwell series of famous paintings that depict these four freedoms. The speech was well received, but some Americans raised objections to one of the freedoms. It was the third freedom, Freedom from Want. To them it seemed a little bit too socialistic. But no one raised an eyebrow at Freedom of Religion. By 1939, it had made it safely into the top four. How did this happen?

Before we get to answer this question, let's establish some clear objectives for our lecture today. First, we'll focus on the religious foundations of these early Massachusetts Settlements that we just briefly mentioned. Next, we'll examine the life of Roger Williams and the great controversy that he stirred up that ultimately led to his banishment. Third, we'll look at the colony he established, Providence, Rhode Island, and how it grows into a thriving settlement dedicated to, among other things, religious tolerance. Finally, we'll examine the long-term influence of Roger Williams on religious freedom, including the Establishment of the First Amendment and beyond that.

Before we get started, let's set out a few broad ideas. On the one hand, as Americans, we often take religious liberty for granted. We assume that it's perfectly normal for people to practice their religion—or no religion at all—without any fear of interference. And we shouldn't take this for granted. We need to remind ourselves of the oceans of blood that have been spilled in the name of religion throughout history. This is a very special right that we should be careful and guard and cherish. On the other hand, as Americans, we often take questions of religion very seriously. Usually these involve the tricky gray areas that exist between the free exercise of religion and something we refer to as “separation of church and state.” Often in these disputes we argue over the definition of what “freedom of religion” actually means. We all love the concept, but we disagree over just what it means. And this is very similar to other disputes we've had. Think about how, on the one hand, we love words like “liberty” and “equality.” And we hold them in high regard. But when we get down to actually putting them in play, we disagree about their meaning. Here we see a vivid example of a theme that's going to appear over and over again in these lectures, which is the idea that history, in many ways, is the study of conflict. Today we will be talking about the conflict over religious freedom.

OK. Let's begin by looking at the religious foundations of these early Massachusetts settlements. Let's start with the Pilgrims. As you remember from our first lecture on the Great Epidemic, they arrived in 1620 and established Plymouth Plantation. The Pilgrims were separatists. And here's what we need to keep in mind. They believed that the Church of England, where they had come from, had become so corrupt and so sinful that it was

beyond redemption. The only proper recourse was to break away from the Church of England and to form a separate righteous Christian community modeled on the early Christian church in the Bible.

The next group, the Puritans, came ten years later. They arrived in 1630. And they established the colony of Massachusetts Bay right next to Plymouth. They were not separatists. They were reformers. They hoped to purify the Church of England by establishing a Christian utopia. Massachusetts would be a model Christian society, an example to show Christians in England their sinful state and need to purify their Church and society. Their goal was simply to purify the Church of England. They believed it was still possible to save it. And they would do so by establishing a Christian utopia in Massachusetts. And this utopia would be a model Christian society. An example, if you will, to show the Christians in England that they were living in a sinful state and that they needed to purify church and society, and that the people of Massachusetts were going to show them how to do it. This purifying idea was embodied in a sermon by Governor John Winthrop, the famous “city upon a hill” sermon. And he delivered this on the eve of their arrival in Massachusetts in 1630. The sermon contained a message that was both hopeful but also ominous. Their goal of establishing a Christian utopia was a high and noble one, but it carried a huge risk because, as Winthrop said, and just listen to these very famous words, “For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.” This meant that if they succeeded in building this righteous Christian community, people would notice. Winthrop goes on to say, “The eyes of all people are upon us.” And this then would trigger the purification of Christianity back home in England. This is what they really wanted. This is their high and mighty goal.

But if they failed in this mission, the world would also notice this. And this would convince the world, and certainly people back in England, that righteous Christian living was impossible, and that there was really no need to try. As Winthrop put it, “So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world”—a story and a byword throughout the world, meaning ridicule us. So, as you can see, Winthrop and the Puritans believe there’s a lot riding

on this Massachusetts Bay experiment. As a consequence, they believed that maintaining orthodoxy was absolutely essential. No dissent, no heresy could be tolerated at all because it might destroy this very important mission. So this explains to some degree why Anne Hutchinson was banished and why Mary Dyer was executed. But, you ask, I thought the Puritans came to the New World for religious freedom? Well, they did—for *their* religious freedom!

OK. Now let's turn our attention to that other great dissenter who ran afoul of the Puritans, Roger Williams. Roger Williams was born in London in 1603. He was the son of a prosperous merchant tailor who saw to it that Roger receive an excellent education. And as it turns out, he was a bright student with a particular gift for languages. He ultimately trained for the ministry. Williams graduated from Cambridge 1627, and he married in 1629. His first job was serving as a chaplain to a wealthy family, a very cushy kind of assignment, very nice, not too many demands. But ultimately, it turned out not to be what Roger Williams wanted. He had participated in the great religious debates of the day in the 1620s, and he had increasingly come to embrace Separatist viewpoint. So, not surprisingly, he decided to head to the new colony of Massachusetts Bay. He and his wife set sail in late 1630 and they arrived there in Boston on February 5, 1631. Almost immediately he had a stroke of great luck. He was invited to fill an open minister position because someone had just gone back to London. But he declined this because he felt that the congregation was insufficiently Separatist.

So then Williams headed north to Salem, Massachusetts, about 25 miles north of Boston. This was a town that was known for being a little bit more radical, a little more Separatist in their theology. It seemed to be a better fit for Williams. He stayed for only a short bit of time because he couldn't find a paid position there. And this is largely due to the fact that ministers in Boston, when they learned his brand of Separatism, warned the people of Salem not to hire him. He was simply too radical for them. So then, out of options in this part of Massachusetts, he then headed south to Plymouth. Here he found exactly what he was looking for—real true-blue separatists. Roger Williams stays there two years and by all accounts he's very well liked by the community. Governor Bradford of Plymouth said, "His teaching was well-approved." Interestingly, while he's there, he not only got along

well with the English settlers in Plymouth but also with the local Indians. He befriended them and studied their culture. Significantly, he not only studied them, he really came to respect them and really to understand their way of life and their view, particularly their view of European colonization, which to them in many ways was unjust. Interestingly, Roger Williams (we already mentioned that he was good at languages) actually learned many of the native languages and eventually published a book called *A Key into the Language of America*. It was really the first of its kind and one that scholars still study today for clues about Native American languages.

But over time Roger Williams eventually wore out his welcome in Plymouth. According to the governor, “He began to fall into some strange opinions and from opinion to practice.” What he’s essentially saying is he not only had some crazy ideas or ideas we objected to, but he began to put them into practice. We don’t exactly know what these views were, but they were definitely enough to prompt him to leave, and so he left in 1633 and headed back to Salem. This time he did manage to land a job as assistant pastor. One year later the head pastor died so Williams then became the acting pastor of this congregation. But by then he’s not only the acting pastor, but he’s thoroughly embroiled in controversy for a number of reasons. First, he began to preach Separatism which, as you will remember, was allowed in Plymouth, but not Massachusetts Bay, so this did not go over well with the powers that be. Secondly, Williams declared that the British claim to Indian lands in America was illegitimate. In fact, he said that the king of England was a liar and a blasphemer for asserting that he had this right to just hand out native American land to Englishmen.

Thirdly, Williams denounced the “citizen’s oath.” This was required of all the people living in Massachusetts Bay colony. In it they pledged their loyalty to the colonial authorities in all matters civic and religious. Roger Williams said the oath was sacrilegious and, by the way, it won’t work. You can’t enforce piety and you can’t enforce loyalty. The fourth thing that Roger Williams did to get into trouble—and here is where he really stepped over the line. He began to argue that civil authorities had no authority whatsoever to punish people for violating the “first tablet” of the 10 Commandments. This is an old language. It meant the first five commandments, covering things like Sabbath breaking, blasphemy, profanity, dishonoring your parents.

These matters and that first five were matters of private conscience according to Roger Williams. He said civil authorities had no business in this realm. They did have business with the other 5 commandments, the second five, because it covered issues like murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and so on. Well, you can imagine, this incredibly radical stuff did not go over well with the officials of Massachusetts Bay. You know how they feel about heresy. In fact to them, to these officials, Roger Williams's ideas challenged the very foundation of their "city upon a hill, ideal" and their attempt to establish this orthodox Christian utopia. And in this, we can see both Roger Williams's gift and his problem in Massachusetts. He was a man who was incredibly firm in his convictions on the one hand. But on the other hand, he had really had no filter, no fear about speaking his mind. This is always what's going to get him into trouble. One of his contemporaries described him as "divinely mad," which is a wonderful expression to convey that notion of Roger Williams's passion, person who just didn't stop to think about what might happen if he spoke his mind.

So what happened? Roger Williams was hauled before the Massachusetts general court a number of times in these years. In July of 1635, for example, he was asked to explain his "erroneous and dangerous opinions." As a result of this encounter, the court ordered that he be removal from his church, sort of relieved of his duties. A few months later, in October of 1635, matters really came to a head. The court accused Roger Williams of spreading "diverse, new, and dangerous opinions." And Roger Williams did not deny the charge. He said in his statement,

I do affirm it to be against the testimony of Christ Jesus for the civil state to impose upon the people a religion, a worship, a ministry. The state should give free and absolute permission of conscience to all men in what is spiritual alone. Ye have lost yourselves! Your breath blows out the candle of liberty in this land.

Well, the court convicted Roger Williams of sedition and heresy and ordered him banished from Massachusetts Bay. They gave him a little time to get his affairs in order, but when he hadn't left by January 1636 (this is about four months later), they decided to deport him back to England. Roger Williams eventually got word of this plan, and he fled into the wilderness in

January of that year. He spent 14 weeks on the run in the dead of winter. As he put it later, “I was sorely tossed for one fourteen weeks, in a bitter winter season, not knowing what bread or bed did mean.” Fortunately for Roger Williams, his experience with Native Americans allowed him to get taken in by a friendly tribe, because he knew their language and knew how to interact with them. The experience of living with native Americans for several weeks during that winter deepened his already pretty strong appreciation of Indian culture, especially their notions of religious tolerance. He later wrote, “They have a modest religious persuasion not to disturb any man, either themselves, English, Dutch, or any, in their conscience and worship; and thereupon say, ‘Peace, hold your peace.’ ” See how this idea is eventually going to form a key part of Roger Williams’s understanding about religious toleration? Religious toleration is a key to maintaining civil peace.

Eventually the winter passed and Roger Williams headed south to find a place to settle. He eventually chose a site on Narragansett Bay at the mouth of a river. He bought the land from local Indians. Remember this is Roger William. He’s not just going to seize it because he doesn’t believe that’s just. And then he sent word to his friends and followers, including his wife and children, to come and join him. On June 16, 1636, these settlers formally established a settlement called “Providence.” Twelve adults signed an agreement in which they agreed to, “active or passive obedience to all such orders as shall be made for the public good ... by the major assent of the present inhabitants ... only in civil things.” Think about those last few words there. Only in civil things. That is Roger Williams’s revolutionary idea in just four words—the separation of church and state. There were precedents for religious toleration and separation of church and state. He does not invent this. There’s a great precedent that he’s certainly aware of in Holland. But Providence in North America is the first American settlement to embody this ideal. A few years later in 1640 the people of Providence signed a new pact in which they pledged to uphold “liberty of conscience.” And it worked. In fact, there’s only one example of civil authorities in Rhode Island intervening in any matter involving religion at all—and that was to punish a man for interfering with another man’s free exercise of religion! So Providence establishes this idea and it seems to be working. Providence was more than just about welcoming disaffected Puritans and Pilgrims. They literally welcomed anybody of all faiths—very radical stuff—including

Catholics and Jews. Many places that tolerated people would sort of draw the line there. But Roger Williams said no. All are welcomed.

The colony of Providence prospered. It grew in size over time. By 1643 Roger Williams decided he had better go to England to get a charter to make all this official. So he heads across the Atlantic, and then comes back with a charter in hand that officially recognizes religious freedom as a key principle of this colony. In 1663 Williams goes back to England a second time to get another charter, the “Charter of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.” Let’s listen to a key passage,

[That] our royal will and pleasure is, that no person within the said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be in any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question, for differences of opinion in matters of religion, and do not actually disturb the civil peace of our said colony; but that all and every person and persons may, from time to time, and at all times hereafter, freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences, in matters of religious concernments.

So in this second charter, Roger Williams is able to make this idea official. And That’s the doctrine of American religious freedom in a nutshell—in an Elizabethan English nutshell, to be sure, but once you work your way through all that fancy language, you can see that the key points are all there.

So what happened next? In the remaining time let’s examine the spread of Roger Williams’s ideas beyond his little colony and how it ultimately shaped the First Amendment and the broad idea in America about religious freedom. Roger William’s idea of religious freedom spread rapidly. In 1664, just one year after he received the second charter, the colony of New Jersey received a charter, and this charter declared, and these words may sound familiar, no one would be, “molested, punished, disquieted or called into question for any matter of religion”—the exact words of Roger Williams’s charter. The next year, in 1665, Carolina was chartered as a colony (just Carolina, not north and south yet). And its charter included nearly identical language on religious toleration. In 1681 William Penn established Pennsylvania as a

haven for persecuted Quakers. But Penn's colony also enshrined this idea of welcoming people of all faiths.

Clearly, by the time that Roger Williams died in 1683 his ideas were spreading rapidly in the colonies, not quite yet in New England. It's going to take them a little bit longer to get with the program. But they're also spreading not just among the colonies but also across the Atlantic to England. And it's there in England that a young philosopher named John Locke published in 1689 his first *Letters Concerning Toleration*. This writing clearly reflects the transatlantic influence of Roger Williams. Let's listen, "I regard it as necessary above all to distinguish between the business of civil government and that of religion," which essentially means civil authorities need to concentrate on civil matters. Let's pick it up again, "It appears not that God has ever given any such authority to one man over another as to compel anyone to his religion."

What about heretics? Didn't civil authorities have an obligation to stamp them out? That's what everybody seemed to think. But Locke said no. That's not what we should do. For one thing, only God knows who's right and wrong in religious disputes. And secondly, the history of religious persecution tells us that it always leads to bad results. Now, why is this essay and these ideas of John Locke significant? John Locke was probably the greatest intellectual and philosophical influence on the Founding Fathers a century later. One recent biographer of Roger Williams, a scholar named Edwin Gaustad, wrote that John Locke "channeled" Roger Williams's ideas to the Founders. I like that notion that they get to Roger Williams through John Locke.

We can see this in the aftermath of the American Revolution. In the mid-1780s Virginia began a vigorous debate that all of the other colonies were listening to and watching very closely about the issue of religious freedom. I mean how far would they go in granting religious liberty? Many of the people in Virginia supported the idea that there would be no established church. That was pretty much done with that kind of arrangement. But not everybody agreed. In fact one very important person disagreed. His name was Patrick Henry. Patrick Henry proposed a bill to levy a general tax on all Virginians to support the Protestant ministry in Virginia. And this is where Thomas Jefferson and James Madison enter the picture. Because they

had both come to believe in the principles of religious toleration and the separation of church and state that were espoused by Roger Williams and John Locke.

To rally opposition to Patrick Henry's attempt to have a state essentially support religion, James Madison wrote a very famous pamphlet entitled: *A Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*. Let's listen to what James Madison had to say on this matter specifically:

Torrents of blood have been spilt in the Old World, by vain attempts of the secular arm to extinguish religious discord, by proscribing all difference in religious opinion. Time has at length revealed the true remedy. Every relaxation of narrow and rigorous policy, wherever it has been tried, has been found to assuage the disease [of religious discord]. The American theater has exhibited proofs that equal and complete liberty, if it does not wholly eradicate it, sufficiently destroys its malignant influence on the health and prosperity of the State.

So James Madison is making the case that if we look to history, we see that trying to enforce religious orthodoxy fails every time and generate all kinds of discord. That relaxations of rules on religion are much more beneficial, and it tends to quiet people down.

James Madison publishes this pamphlet, and it becomes very, very popular, and it triggers a huge flood of pamphlets from small religious groups like Baptists and Methodists. They actually were in those days very small and were actually minor players. They like the idea of rejecting Patrick Henry's bill because they saw it as favoring more established religions. In 1785 Patrick Henry's bill for the tax assessment to support religion went down to defeat. At this moment, James Madison senses that he's got a bit of momentum on his side, and he decides to re-introduce a bill Thomas Jefferson had written a few years earlier back in 1779. It was a bill for establishing religious freedom. Let's listen to what it says. So it's 1785. Madison introduces Jefferson's bill which reads,

Be it therefore enacted by the General Assembly, that no man shall be compelled to frequent [which means attend] or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in nowise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.

Well, James Madison was right. He did have momentum on his side. This bill, written by Thomas Jefferson, passed in 1786. There you have it, in those lines, the notion of complete freedom of religion. And it's really important to point out here a key distinction. This is not merely a call for toleration. What Madison and Jefferson are calling for is complete freedom of religion. Toleration means it's too limited. It means that while you might allow one group to practice their religion, it also means that at some point in the future you might take that right away. So complete freedom of religion is what they're after.

One year later in 1787, delegates to the Constitutional Convention gathered in Philadelphia. The Constitution that they drafted mentioned religion only once but in a very important way. Article VI read, "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." Meaning you don't have to be a certain religion in order to participate in public office. As soon as the Constitution was ratified in 1788, Madison and others of his same mind set began to work on a Bill of Rights. They wanted to because they had promised this would be part of the package. The Constitution would have a Bill of Rights attached to it afterwards to allay people's fears. In particular, on this issue of religion, Madison and others wanted an explicit statement about the right to religious freedom. They didn't believe it was good enough to have an implied freedom. They wanted actual wording in there that said religious freedom.

Let's listen to those famous 16 words that end up constituting the key part of the First Amendment. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Just 16 words. Note how the words are phrased in the negative. Congress can't

do this—“can make no law.” This is true of most early amendments of the constitution. The First Amendment essentially restrains federal power. It’s also interesting to note that of the other issues that are mentioned in the First Amendment—free speech, freedom of the press, free assembly—only the part about religion gets two specific parts. On the one hand it calls for no establishment of religion, and it also says the government may not meddle, may not hamper the “free exercise.” The First Amendment was, of course, a federal amendment, so states were free to do as they pleased. But over time, every state would eventually eliminate their established churches. Massachusetts was the last to do so in 1833. And states began to eliminate test oaths for office, meaning you had to be of a certain religion in order to hold office.

So, what was the long-term impact of this radical idea of religious liberty? First, it led to an explosion of religious diversity in America. There’s a great book on this topic written by a man named Steven Waldman, and it’s called, *Founding Faith*. And in this there’s a wonderful set of words that he uses to describe what exactly the founders were after. He argues (and let’s listen to the wording here), “The Founding Faith, then, was not Christianity, and it was not secularism. It was religious liberty—a revolutionary formula for promoting faith by leaving it alone.” Think about that—“promoting faith by leaving it alone” That is indeed a revolutionary formula.

A second impact of Roger Williams’s idea of religious liberty was that it narrowed the range of disputes over religious freedom in America. Roger Williams and the First Amendment do not solve the problems that are associated with separation of church and state and free exercise of religion, but they did manage to help us to narrow the scope of the argument. Nobody in America these days argues anymore for an established church or religious tests (oaths for office holders), and we certainly don’t call for the prosecution of heretics. Freedom of religion is now widely understood as a central element of American democracy. Just think about the Four Freedoms that we mentioned at the beginning. Now we know, of course, that the United States has encountered—this has not been a smooth transition to embracing this idea—the United States has had many bumps in the road over the course of the last 200 years, plus developing this ideal of religious freedom. It was called into question with the great influx of Catholic immigrants in the mid-

19th century, the rise of the Mormon faith and their practice of polygamy, the Jehovah's Witnesses in the 1930s and 1940s suing the government over the fact they didn't want to have to say the Pledge of Allegiance, Native Americans in more recent times suing for the right to use peyote in some of their ceremonies, a mild hallucinogenic that up until granting them this right meant that they were subject to prosecution for criminal possession. But most fights in American history and in the present do not focus on "free expression." And this is important. Instead, our arguments and our contention focus on questions concerning the definition of "establishment." These include familiar things like arguments over whether or not there should be scenes of baby Jesus in the public square or menorahs in December, whether there should be prayer or a moment of silence in public schools, or should court rooms be allowed to display the Ten Commandments, or should we have Muslim prayer rooms in public places like airports, or should state governments be allowed to fund parochial schools. These, without question, are very important issues, but they are shall we dare say "the small stuff" compared to questions of free exercise. And we should not underestimate the significance of this remarkable accomplishment. America is one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world. And if we believe the polling data, America's also one of the most religious nations in the world. Even though this is the case, we have avoided the great bloodshed and turmoil over religion that has rocked so many other countries. We can trace this tradition to Roger Williams and his ideas of religious liberty.

Well, for our next lecture, we'll examine the origins of another key American principle with important ties to freedom of religion: an inclusive immigration policy that transformed, and continues to transform, America as a nation of immigrants.

1654 Yearning to Breathe Free—Immigration

Lecture 4

From the very first, immigration has had a profound impact on American history. New Amsterdam, the colonies' biggest commercial port, had an unofficial policy that anyone willing to work was welcome—an attitude that became central to the American character. Over the centuries, the immigration tradition has faced constant challenges from nativists fearful of certain immigrants. But each time, intolerance has been swept aside and the immigration tradition has prevailed.

One of the first notable incidents in American history where the ideal of inclusion overruled the impulse to exclude a group of immigrants took place in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam—present-day New York. In 1654, 23 Jewish refugees who had been expelled from Recife, Brazil, by the Portuguese arrived in New Amsterdam. Peter Stuyvesant, governor of the colony, was an anti-Semite; he wrote to the colony's directors, the Dutch West India Company, seeking authorization expel the Jews on the pretense that their poverty was a financial burden on the profit-minded colony. But the refugees' leaders sent their own letter to Holland, asking fellow Jews there to help them secure the right to stay.

In the spring of 1655, the company announced that Jews were permitted to emigrate to and live in New Amsterdam, “so long as they do not become a burden to the company or the community.” This small incident was a symbolic turning point, the first notable expression of the idea that all are welcome in America.

Americans tend to take immigration for granted, but most countries resist immigration to preserve national culture, ethnicity, and religion. Even in the United States, the immigration tradition has faced constant challenges from fearful nativists, usually trying to turn away a specific group of “undesirables.” The seventh complaint of the Declaration of Independence cited the British crown's “obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither.” Yet in the 1790s, Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts aimed at restricting

immigration and silencing those who supported it. The acts even empowered the president to expel or imprison “dangerous” aliens. In these examples of shifting opinion, alternately celebrating and condemning immigration, we see a pattern that persists to this very day in American society.

It’s important to note that the typical immigrant doesn’t head for the United States on a whim. Immigration is a terrifying prospect, and history shows that most people wouldn’t consider it. Even in dire circumstances like the Irish Famine of 1845–1850, only 1.2 million of Ireland’s 8 million citizens decided to emigrate, and of those who stayed behind, another 1.2 million died. The common causes of emigration are “push” factors like a population

In these examples of shifting opinion, alternately celebrating and condemning immigration, we see a pattern that persists to this very day in American society.

boom, industrialization, persecution, and natural disasters and “pull” factors like available jobs or land and religious and ethnic tolerance.

America has had four major periods of immigration since 1815. The Old Immigration period, from 1820 to 1880, saw the arrival of 8 million immigrants, mostly from northern and western Europe, plus a small number of Chinese. This wave of immigration played a key role in industrialization and westward expansion, but it also gave rise to America’s first anti-immigrant political party, the Know-Nothings.

The New Immigration period, from 1880 to 1924, brought immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, particularly Italians and Russian Jews. This time, the nativist backlash led to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the formation of the American Protective Association (1887) and the Immigration Restriction League (1894). But it also led to a rising multicultural ideal, as exemplified by Emma Lazarus’s ode to the Statue of Liberty, “The New Colossus” (1883).

But despite these sentiments, anti-immigrant hostility intensified in the late 19th century. The result was the 1890 Federal Immigration Act. Ellis Island immigrants were thereafter screened for four categories of exclusion: poor

health, poverty, criminality, and radicalism. Still, only two percent of would-be immigrants were ever turned away.

The third period of immigration was Restriction (1924–1965). The 1924 National Origins Act restricted immigration to 156,000 people per year, with quotas for every country; 86 percent of the quota was allocated to northern and western Europeans.

Finally, in the modern period, the civil rights movement led to the repeal of the National Origins Act on its obvious racist intent. Since its repeal, 30 million immigrants have come to America from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Today, multiculturalists and nativists still debate immigration issues in America, but from a historical perspective, America is indisputably richer, in all senses of the word, thanks to the contributions of its immigrants. ■

Suggested Reading

Daniels, *Coming to America*.

Takaki, *A Different Mirror*.

Questions to Consider

1. What was the primary idea behind the policy to allow unrestricted emigration to the American colonies and, later, the United States?
2. Why have Americans always had a love-hate relationship with immigration?

1654 Yearning to Breathe Free—Immigration

Lecture 4—Transcript

Hello again and welcome. Let me start with a test. What do these Americans have in common? Entertainer Bob Hope, Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, actor Desi Arnez, presidents Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk, Hollywood director Frank Capra, Andy Grove, founder of Intel, environmentalist John Muir, actor William Shatner, Founding Father Alexander Hamilton, blue jeans manufacturer Levi Strauss, architect Maya Lin, fashion designer Liz Claiborne, publisher Joseph Pulitzer, steel king Andrew Carnegie, songwriter Irving Berlin.

Well, you've probably guessed. All of these people are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Some of these people you recognize, probably Andrew Carnegie, you know came from Scotland. But Liz Claiborne? Andrew Jackson? William Shatner? There are always surprises in lists like this. But we shouldn't actually be surprised because of the profound impact of immigration has had on American history from the very beginnings. In fact, immigration is one of the central themes in all of American history.

Why is this so? Well, that's exactly what we'll be looking at in this lecture today. So during this lecture on America's long history of immigration we'll focus on four things. To start, we'll look at one of the first notable incidents in American history where the ideal of inclusion overruled the impulse to exclude a group of immigrants. Next, we'll examine how this open immigration tradition grew and strengthened over the coming centuries. From there we'll explore why the typical immigrant—then and now—heads for the United States. Finally, we'll examine four major periods of immigration after 1815 and how they've, one after another, transformed America.

Let's begin by looking at that first notable incident in American history that I mentioned. The first notable incident in American history where the ideal of inclusion overruled the impulse to exclude a group of immigrants. This incident took place in Dutch colony of New Amsterdam present-day New York. New Amsterdam was founded back in 1626 by the Dutch. And over the next couple of decades, by the 1640s, it had involved into a fairly

prosperous commercial outpost administered by a private company, the Dutch West India Company. Unlike the Puritans to the North, the Dutch no utopian visions about a religious community. They wanted to make money. This was a commercial enterprise. As a result, New Amsterdam welcomed pretty much anyone regardless of race, nationality, or religion. And the result of this was an incredibly diverse population. How diverse? In 1643, this is less than 20 years after the colony was founded, the governor told a visiting French priest, who was visiting New Amsterdam, that the town, the colony, had 500 residents, who spoke 18 languages!

Clearly, the unofficial policy of New Amsterdam was anybody who is willing to work and contribute to the economic growth of the colony was welcome. And it was that policy that eventually became central to the American character. But this ideal, even though we can see its great upside, this ideal faced its first major test in 1654 when 23 Jewish refugees arrived in New Amsterdam. They'd been expelled from former Dutch colony of Recife in Brazil. And they were expelled when the Portuguese seized the colony from the Dutch and kicked out the Jewish residents.

These refugees arrived in New Amsterdam, like most refugees, penniless and desperate. The governor of the colony, a guy named Peter Stuyvesant, did not like Jews. And he didn't want to let them settle there so he wrote a letter to the directors of the Dutch West India Company in Holland seeking the authorization to expel them. Stuyvesant's pretense was that these people with their poverty would become a burden on the colony, when in fact the reality was simply anti-Semitic. He didn't like Jews and he did not want them living in the community.

But while Stuyvesant's letter was going across the ocean to seek permission to expel them, the Jewish refugees, themselves, also sent letters to Holland asking their fellow Jewish friends, significant merchants in Holland, and they asked them to intervene on their behalf. These Jews in Holland petitioned the Dutch West India Company and pointed out two very important things: One that there were many Jews living in Holland who were big contributors to the colony there, and that many of them were investors in the Dutch West India Company; they were stockholders. That's a pretty good argument. In the spring of 1655 the Dutch West India Company settled the issue. They

sent a message to Stuyvesant that said that Jews were permitted to emigrate to and live in New Amsterdam, “so long as they do not become a burden to the company or the community.” This small community of Jews eventually flourished in New Amsterdam, and became very important contributors to its economic growth over the next few decades.

So does this obscure incident in early American history really constitute a turning point? In this case, I’ve chosen this incident as a symbolic turning point. And it’s a really important one to emphasize. Why? The simple answer is that most Americans take immigration for granted. We think immigration is a perfectly normal thing, and countries receiving immigrants generally welcome them. But in truth that’s simply not the case. Most countries resist immigration and they do so to preserve their culture, their ethnicity, and their religion. The United States is a unique exception to this rule. No country has welcomed so many immigrants from so many places for so many centuries. This is a radical idea. So where did this radical idea originate? Well we don’t have a clear answer. Nobody issued a memo or position paper. But we can point to this incident early, early on in American history, this incident in New Amsterdam in 1654 as the first notable expression of the idea that all are welcome in America. Few ideas have had so great an impact on the history of the United States. This idea has shaped the economy, culture, religion, language, cuisine, and so much more. And this is what makes it a major turning point in American history.

Now let’s examine how this immigration tradition grew and strengthened over the coming centuries after 1654. For one thing, we need to acknowledge the immigration tradition faced constant challenges from nativists. Nativists are people who do not like immigrants and deem native born Americans as superior to the incoming immigrants. For example (and there are many examples of nativists’ attempts to keep certain people out), in 1705, way back in early colonial history, the colony of Maryland posed a head tax on Irish immigrants, and this was to discourage ship captains from bringing them (indentured servants) to the colony. Most of these immigrants were Catholic, and they wanted to keep the Catholic population down.

In 1753 Benjamin Franklin called upon Pennsylvania to bar German immigrants from “Germantown.” Franklin’s opposition to the Germans was

that they were forming a German town in a corner of Philadelphia, and to Franklin they seemed utterly unassimilable. Let's listen to Benjamin Franklin to see specifically what he has to say about Germans living in Germantown in Pennsylvania in the 1750s:

Why should the *Palatine Boors* [Now you're just going to have to trust me that that's not a nice thing to say about Germans] be suffered to swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours? Why should *Pennsylvania*, founded by the *English*, become a Colony of *Aliens*, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion.

Well this is Benjamin Franklin, probably the most tolerant, open-minded of the Founding Fathers, but he's having problems with German immigration. Despite Franklin's angry words, and despite the angry words and attempts by other people in colonial America to exclude other immigrants, every time one of these nativist moments occurs, it's usually swept aside over time, and immigration continues to come to America.

Just a few years after Franklin, just to give you a good example of this (Franklin wrote those words in 1753), just a few years after Franklin's rant against the Germans, he helped write the Declaration of Independence, where we all know the front end of it after Jefferson's beautiful introduction where he talks about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the colonists listed their grievances against George III. The seventh complaint of the second half of the Declaration of Independence complained that King George III had tried to suppress the population growth of the colonies. Let's listen to what the Declaration has to say on this matter: "He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither." So the angry King George III, among other things, were slowing down immigration. Americans understood immigration is vital to the growth of the colonies and now, they hoped, to the United States.

A few years later in 1782, a man named Hector St. John De Crevecoeur, a French immigrant to America, wrote a book called *Letters of an American Farmer*. It's really one of the first full-blown attempts to explain to the world what this place is that's called the United States of America. He wrote, "Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world." Hopefully you heard that. He really is the first person to invoke the melting pot metaphor. And he also said this is what's going to make America a dominant nation in the years to come. He's catching on to the diversity question and the diversity factor in American history. He's also saying this is going to lead to American greatness in the years to come.

But, as always, the pendulum swings in both directions. So just a few years after that in the 1790s, we see President John Adams sign into law the Alien and Sedition Acts. The Sedition Act was designed to silence critics of his administration, people who were members of the emerging Jeffersonian Republican Party. The Alien Acts was designed to silence and intimidate recently arrived French and Irish immigrants, many who were radicals and free-thinkers who naturally gravitated toward the Jeffersonian party. The Alien Acts raised residency requirements from five to 14 years. You had to wait 14 years until you could become a citizen. You couldn't vote during those years. The Alien Acts also empowered the president to expel or imprison aliens deemed dangerous. The controversy over the Alien and Sedition Acts played a key role in John Adams's defeat in the election of 1800, which is something we'll talk about when we get to that lecture.

In these examples of shifting opinion, celebrating immigration at one point, condemning immigration on another, we see a pattern that persists to this very day in American society. For the most part, Americans accept immigration as a normal and desirable thing. But periodically they succumb to fear and declare that immigrants, or at least one group of them, pose a dire threat to the republic. This nativist impulse soon leads to demands for laws ending or restricting immigration. Then Americans eventually calm down, and immigration continues uninterrupted. When something happens—usually a war or an economic downturn, the nativist impulse resurfaces. And we have been doing this for almost 400 years!

Let's pause at this moment to explore why a typical immigrant decides to head for the United States, whether it's in the 1640s or sometime in the 21st century. The first key point about immigration is that it's not the normal thing to do. Now what on earth do I mean by this? I say this because most Americans, because of the deep immigration tradition in our society and culture, we tend to think that immigration is commonplace decision, that when things go bad in some part of the world, what do people do? Well they jump on a boat or board a plane and head for America. But in fact the historical record tells something quite different. In most of human history, that's not what people do. It's not the "normal" thing to do to leave your country and go someplace else. In most of human history, even for people facing suffering and death, natural disasters, foreign invasions, or religious persecution, they don't jump on a boat to America. What do most people do? In these circumstances, most people try to ride out the hard times. They wait. They just hope and pray that things will get better, that whatever the terrible incidents are or whatever terrible things are happening will pass, because the other option—immigrating—is actually more terrifying in some cases than the prospect of staying home and continue enduring the suffering. Most people, again going back hundreds or thousands of years, won't even consider it.

Let's just take one example: The Irish Famine of 1845–1850. For the Irish facing famine, they had three excellent reasons to come to America. First, mass starvation and disease. The famine was caused by—well, many factors behinds it but just keep it real simple and say a shortage of food, which means many people were starving. And, as always with famines, disease is running rampant through the countryside. The second factor that would entice people to leave was that landlords were offering free tickets to America. They had to pay for their people's food cost, so if they could get rid of them they would save some money.

And the third reason was that there were hundreds of thousands Irish immigrants already in American cities like Boston and New York. So with these three incentives to leave, out of the 8 million people living in Ireland during the famine, how many left? Just a little over a million. And the rest? They opted to ride it out. And as a result, 1.2 million people died during the famine in just five years. Like I said, immigration was rare and exceptional.

So what compels some people to make that rare and exceptional decision to immigrate? Historians like to cite push factors. These are the things that make you think about leaving wherever you are. And these are often things like population boom; industrialization, which is very disruptive to people in certain jobs; religious and ethnic persecution; and disasters, like the famine that I just mentioned.

There are two sides to immigration. That's what makes you think about leaving your country. Now where are you going to go? Well, the number one destination in the world is the United States. That's been the case for hundreds of years. And the number one reason, the number one pull factor pull factor to choose America is jobs and land. That's the number one reason. We like to think as Americans it's about freedom but that's a little too vague as I always tell my students. You need to be more specific. What kind of freedom? Freedom for economic opportunity? Freedom to rise? Freedom to do better? Freedom to for your children to have a better life than you did? And along with that come very important pull factors like democracy and tolerance. Those things are number two and number three on the list.

Now, let's turn our attention to how all this plays out in U.S. history. Let's examine the four major periods of immigration after 1815 and examine how each one has transformed America. The first period is known to historians as the "Old Immigration," and that was roughly from 1820 to 1880. And it's triggered by the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. That meant that transatlantic trade across the Atlantic would resume, and it triggered the first great wave of immigration. We should stop right here and point out that immigrants are cargo. Now this is not meant to be disrespectful of anybody's ancestors, but immigrants are cargo and they go on transatlantic ships going to ports and that explains one of the reasons why New York City is the number one destination for immigrants. At least to get there, because that's where 70 percent of America's imports are heading into.

From 1820 to 1880, roughly 8 million immigrants from this Old Immigration period, and they come from specific places like northern and western Europe. This means that the four big groups are Irish, the Germans, English, and Scandinavians, and then a small number of Chinese, who came primarily during the Gold Rush. And the numbers are quite staggering, particularly the

way they grow. About 130,000 immigrants come in the 1820s. That number jumps to 538,000 in the 1830s. And over one million in the 1840s. Almost three million in the 1850s, and so it goes. This huge migration of people in a very short period of time has a dramatic impact on American demography. And we can see this just by looking at New York City in 1865. New York City's population broke down as follows: 47 percent of the population were American-born whites; the next big group with 22 percent were Irish-born citizens; then 15 percent were German-born; 15 percent were a whole mix of other immigrants, and 1 percent were African American. Now that's a diverse city, and less than half the people are American-born.

This Old Immigration from 1820 to the 1880 period had a huge role in fueling America's industrial expansion, a really central role. And also the other thing that's happening at that time period, which is westward expansion. Just to give you one example on that, in 1880 a third of the people living in Minnesota were foreign-born. That's an equivalent number to the foreign-born people living in Boston. So the westward expansion is very much linked to immigration. But it also—this Old Immigration—generated the first big-time anti-immigrant movement American history. It was a political movement, and it was known as the American Party. We know it mostly by its nickname, the Know Nothings. Now why were they called Know Nothings? Well, part of the intrigue about the Know Nothings was that they were a secret organization, and they instructed their members, if they were ever asked about the organization that they should say, "I know nothing," so it kind of added to the mystery of it. The Know Nothings rise in the 1840s and have their biggest moment in the 1850s, when they pledged to curb immigration, delay citizenship for immigrants, and deny public office-holding to anybody of foreign birth. The American Party in the 1850s storms the American political scene. In the elections of 1854 and 1855, the American Party wins control, complete control, of the state governments of Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. And then has even more electoral victories in the next year in 1855. In that period they elect 75 congressmen, not necessarily directly members of the American Party, but people who were affiliated with it or expressed sympathy with it. So the Know Nothings in that period appear to be the next big thing. As history plays out, they will actually fade away in the 1850s almost as quickly

as they arrived because of the coming of the Civil War. And immigration is unhindered as the Know Nothings fade away.

So now let's turn to the New Immigration. This is the period of the second phase, 1880 to 1924. In the early 1880s the Old Immigration flows from England, Ireland, and Scandinavian, and so forth, begin to diminish, and the new flow of immigration begins to rise rather precipitously from eastern and southern Europe, and people begin to call this the "New Immigration." Between 1880 and 19, 20 million immigrants from eastern and southern Europe come to the United States. The largest groups of immigrants are Italians, coming from Italy, and Jews from all over the Russian empire, but also a large number of Poles, Greeks, Hungarians, Slovaks, and Czechs, pretty much all across southern and eastern Europe. And this immigration is going to have a dramatic impact, as the previous one did, on American society. But, like the previous migration, it's also going to generate another nativist backlash.

In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which focused just on Chinese immigration but barred them outright. Five years later an anti-immigration organization known as the American Protective Association was founded, and it's centered largely in the Midwest, and their biggest concern is the rise in Catholic immigration. And they will have about 500,000 members by the 1890s. In 184, the Immigration Restriction League was founded. So you see the laws and anti-immigrant movements forming in this period. However, increasingly, in this very moment of immigration agitation, we also start to see the evolution and the emergence of competing ideal, what I call the "multicultural ideal." This is a language and set of ideals that defend immigration and interpret immigration as a positive force in American life. Probably the best example of this is a poem by Emma Lazarus, titled "The New Colossus." Now this was an ode to the Statue of Liberty that she wrote three years before the Statue of Liberty was actually unveiled in New York Harbor, but people knew what it looked like anyway. They'd seen pictures. And it's really important to find out here that the Statue of Liberty was not built with immigration in mind. In the American mind, it's become so linked with immigration because it's close to Ellis Island and it's right there in New York Harbor. But it was initially just a celebration of the two revolutions the French and American Revolution in the late 18th century. Lazarus is one of

the first people to start that linkage between the Statue of Liberty and the aspirations of these millions of immigrants that are going to pass right in front of it arriving in on ships heading in to America. Let's listen to Emma Lazarus's poem to get the sense of the linkage that she's making:

Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her
name Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glowes world-wide welcome; ... 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!"

Well those will go on to become very famous words in American history. And clearly celebrating the idea that America is a haven for poor, dispossessed people from all around the world. Despite these sentiments of Emma Lazarus and others, anti-immigrant hostility just intensifies in the late 19th century. You can see this if you were to pick up a magazine. A popular magazine in the 1880s through the 20th century are often filled with anti-immigrant cartoons. The one that I use a lot when I talk to my students is called "The Fool Pied Piper." It was published in a major magazine—a bright, colorful cartoon—in 1909 that showed Uncle Sam as the Fool Pied Piper. He's playing a flute and leading rats out from Europe across the Atlantic Ocean to America. And the rats, upon closer inspection, reveal that they are immigrants, and they are labeled "Thief," and "Disease," and "Anarchists," and so forth. I think you get the picture.

The result of this rising anti-immigrant hostility in the late 19th century led to Congress passing the Federal Immigration Act of 1890 to screen immigrants and try to sort out the wanted from the unwanted. And this is the law that gives us Ellis Island in 1892 and a lot of little Ellis islands in port cities across America. The purpose of Ellis Island was to establish four categories of exclusion, four reasons why you wouldn't be allowed into the country. One was poor health. Another was poverty. Another was criminality, if they found out you had a criminal record. Or radicalism, if they could somehow determine that you were an anarchist. The number one thing they would look for and that they could find was poor health. Yet even with Ellis Island and

dozens of other federal immigrant screening stations in port cities across the country, only two percent of immigrants were sent back. Just two percent!

Immigration continued at a record pace in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: 2.7 million in the 1870s; 5.2 million in the 1880s; smaller number—about 3.7 million in the 1890s—but that’s only because America had a depression in that decade. In the first decade of the 20th century, 8.2 million immigrants came to America. That’s the record-holding decade. The impact of this migration—well again, let’s look at the composition of American cities to see how dramatically this is changing America’s demographic complexion. In 1910 the percentage of immigrants and their foreign-born children in places like New York: 78 percent; Chicago: 77 percent; San Francisco: 68 percent. That is, in New York, almost 80 percent of the citizens of New York are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Overall the American population in 1910 was 14.8 percent foreign-born. That’s one out of every 7 Americans was born outside the United States! Compare that to 12.5 percent foreign-born in 2010.

Well the next period we need to talk about begins in 1924, and that’s the period of Restriction. Despite the emergence of this multicultural ideal that we noted, Restrictionists finally win a round in the 1920s, with the passage of the National Origins Act. It dramatically reduced the number of immigrants down to 156,000 per year instead of hundreds of thousands a year, sometimes over a million a year, and then assigned quotas for every country that would be sending immigrants to America. These quotas reflected racial and ethnic preferences very, very clearly. Eighty-six percent of the quota spots (this new law) were allocated to northern and western Europe. These were preferred regions of Europe. What was the impact of this? Italians in the 1920s, sad to say, were an unwanted group. So before the Restriction Law, from 1900 to 1920, they averaged about 160,000 immigrants per year. They were one of the biggest groups coming to America. So from the 160,000 per year, the quota law in 1924 reduced their number down to just 4,000.

Now what about Germans? Germans were a preferred group. They were given a huge quota of 51,000. But only a few thousand Germans came every year so those quota spots went unused. And yet, even with the restrictions on immigration, this period from 1924 to the middle 1960s totaled five million

immigrants. From the 1920s to the 1960s, these were because immigrants were coming from nations not covered by the quota restrictions, or they were refugees from post-war Europe.

The next big phase begins in 1965. It's a reflection of the 1960s in the civil rights movement and liberalism of that decade. People in the 1960s were pushing for civil rights laws. They also noticed that the 1924 immigration law was based on racist quotas, very explicative, so they said this law has to go. The resulting new law triggered another great wave of immigration. It's still going. This is the one we're living in right now. Thirty million immigrants, and counting, and as always from different places. Now they come from Africa, from Asia, and from Latin America

So it should be pretty clear immigration has profoundly shaped and reshaped American society over the centuries. Now it has not been an easy process. We know this because there are periodic upsurges of nativism that make it very clear. But over time the United States has developed a language and a set of ideas about the virtues and requirements of building a multicultural society that now compete with periodic nativism movements.

Over the centuries, the United States has been strengthened by this immigration tradition—strengthened economically, culturally, morally, and perhaps most importantly, culinarily! How long could you live without Chinese food? Or pizza? The centrality of immigration to the American story is captured in the preface of a book written by historian Oscar Handlin. He was a pioneer scholar in the history of immigration. He wrote, in what became a Pulitzer prize winning book *The Uprooted*, “Once I thought to write a history of American immigration. Then I discovered that immigrants *were* American history.” Immigration is central to America. I think you'll agree that this tradition that goes way back into the 17th century constitutes a significant turning point in American history.

In our next lecture, we'll return to the 17th century to a violent episode called King Philip's War. Thank you.

1676 Near Disaster—King Philip’s War

Lecture 5

King Philip’s War (1675–1676), in per capita terms, was the deadliest war in American history, yet few people today have ever heard of it. The Wampanoag leader Metacom (a.k.a. King Philip) led a confederation of Indian tribes in a desperate attempt to regain lands both sold to and stolen by the Europeans. Atrocities were committed on both sides. Eventually, the better-armed, larger colonial militias overwhelmed the natives. Ironically, Metacom’s attempt to expel the Europeans drove the disparate groups of colonists toward unity for the first time.

In the 1620s and 1670s, European settlements in New England flourished thanks to a high birth rate with low infant mortality and an organized system of expansion. Scarcity of tillable land led the English to push west and the Dutch north into the Connecticut River valley, home of the native Pequot tribes. The resulting Pequot War (1636–1637) ended in genocide; the Europeans, allied with other native tribes, wiped out the Pequots in the Mystic Massacre, a horrible dress rehearsal for King Philip’s War 40 years later.

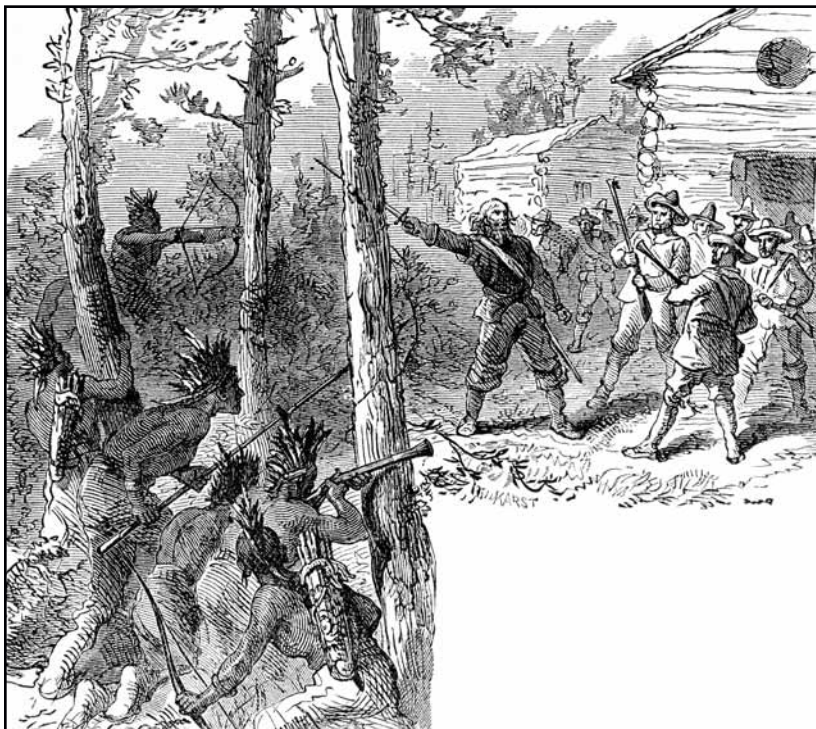
By 1675, there were about 70,000 English settlers in 100 towns in New England. Meanwhile, the fur trade had collapsed due to overhunting. The Plymouth Indians were hemmed in by settlers and losing their land—their only resource—to the settlers’ cattle grazing.

Rumors began to spread that King Philip, sachem (intertribal leader) of the Wampanoag and Narraganset Indians, was planning a revolt. The Plymouth Colony’s leaders forced him to sign a humiliating treaty and pay annual fees as a “subject” of the colony and the English king. In response, Philip took advantage of English greed and sold off the last of his peoples’ land to buy guns, then made alliances with other tribes.

In mid-January 1675, Philip’s translator, John Sassamon, betrayed Philip’s plans to Plymouth’s leaders. Sassamon was murdered, and three Wampanoags were hanged for the crime in early June. On June 20th, Philip

laid siege to the town of Swansea, and the fighting began in earnest. By the next winter, all of New England was at war.

At first, the Indians had the upper hand and destroyed many frontier towns. In March 1676, they attacked Plymouth Plantation and burned Providence. The natives further taunted the settlers by attacking Christianity—destroying Bibles and burning churches. One witness to the devastation, Nathaniel Saltonstall, listed over 20 towns wholly or partially in ruins, and he added that many men, women, and children had been “destroyed with exquisite torments and most inhumane barbarities,” which he described in graphic detail. This set the tone for many accounts of the war, which ignored English atrocities, including the annihilation of the entire Narraganset tribe.



Metacom's siege of the village of Swansea on June 20, 1675, was the first battle of King Philip's War.

Gradually, the colonial militias—who were more numerous, better armed, and more ruthless—began sweeping assaults on Indian villages. Thousands were killed and forced into exile; hundreds were taken prisoner and sold into slavery. On August 12, 1676, Philip was captured, beheaded, drawn, and quartered. The war was effectively over.

King Philip's War was a turning point in American history for several reasons. The level of violence and brutality on both sides was shocking. The Indians came unbelievably close to driving the English out of New England entirely. The human toll came to 1,200 English settlers and over 3,700 natives. The Indian population would never recover their land or

their numbers. The colonists now had a shared experience which fostered a sense of American identity; the many were starting to become one.

Many accounts of the war ... ignored English atrocities, including the annihilation of the entire Narraganset tribe.

Despite its relative obscurity today, the memory of the war was very significant to the early colonists.

Many books and essays were written that demonized the Indians. Then, strangely, in 1814, Washington Irving's essay "Philip of Pokanoket" depicted Philip as a hero and patriot defending his people. John Augustus Stone's 1829 play *Metamora; or, the Last of the Wampanoags*, which depicted Philip as a tragic hero, was a smash hit and the most performed play of the 19th century.

What caused this transformation? Americans could now safely reify the native tribes that were dead and gone, and the noble savage image tapped into 19th-century notions of masculinity, strength, and independence. Ironically, these were also the values of the westward expansion, which would once again bring European-American settlers into conflict with the natives. ■

Suggested Reading

Lepore, *The Name of War*.

Mandell, *King Philip's War*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why do societies keep alive the memory of some wars like the Civil War and forget others like King Philip's War?
2. How did the course of British–Native American relations in the mid-17th century establish a pattern that would persist until the end of the 19th century?

1676 Near Disaster—King Philip’s War

Lecture 5—Transcript

Hello again. Welcome back. Let’s begin with a quiz. What’s the most deadly war in U.S. history? WWII? Vietnam? Civil War? These are good guesses—but the actual answer is King Philip’s War, which took place in southern New England in 1675 and 1676. It was the deadliest war in terms of per capita losses with some 1, 200 colonists killed. Half the towns in New England were attacked, and about one-third were destroyed or badly damaged. Now, why is it that so few Americans know anything about this war? Or even on a more broad level, we should ask: Why don’t we count the Indian Wars with our “regular wars,” like WWII and Vietnam?

Well, before we try to answer these questions and to explain the saga of King Philip’s War, let’s establish our objectives for this lecture. We’ll focus on four things. First, we’ll look at the status of the New England colonies in the 1640s–1670s. Then we’ll move on to examine the rising tensions between native and English settlers. Then we’ll explore King Philip’s War itself. And then finally, we’ll examine the results of that war and how it served to shape American identity for centuries to come.

Let’s begin by first clarifying something right at the outset: Who was King Philip? It’s really important to know that he was not a European king. Many people mistakenly assume he was, in a similar way that some people think the French and Indian War was a war that pitted the French against the Indians. Philip was a Wampanoag Indian chief, or sachem, and he lived in Massachusetts. He led this devastating war against the English colonists in New England in 1675–1676.

OK, with that detail clarified, let’s examine the status of the New England colonies in the period between the 1620s–1670s. In a word, the colonies flourished in this period. They experienced rapid population growth due to a very high birthrate that averaged 7–8 children per family, low infant mortality, and a very healthy environment. New Englanders also benefited from the fact that they tended to migrate as families and settle in towns. This was in sharp contrast to Jamestown and the Chesapeake region, where you’ll remember from our lecture in slavery that huge numbers of people

died. What about relations with the local Indians in this period? Relations were generally quite peaceful in these years. Some of this was due to the fact that Indians and colonists established many mutually beneficial trade arrangements, mainly in fur.

Peaceful relations were also due to the fact that the populations of these two groups were still relatively small. This meant that disputes over land were relatively rare. But they did sometimes flare up as the growing English population began to push further into the interior, from east to west, establishing a network of towns toward and into the Connecticut River valley. The worst incident in these early years was the Pequot War. This took place in 1636–1637. It was triggered by Dutch incursions into this area from the South and English incursions from the East. When the Pequot tribe resisted these incursions, the Europeans formed alliances with other tribes and wiped out the Pequots. The worst incident in this war was the Mystic Massacre. About 600 Pequot Indians, mostly women and children, took refuge in a fortress in present-day Mystic, Connecticut. The English attacked and set it on fire. In the end, nearly all 600 were killed. This was, as we shall see, was pretty much a horrible dress rehearsal for King Philip's War 40 years later. A relative peace then ensued after the Pequot War for the next several decades. By 1675 New England had a population of about 70,000 English settlers, clustered in 100 towns.

Now that we've examined the growth and spread of English colonization in New England, let's turn our attention to the rising tensions that did in fact crop up between Native and English settlers. Well, the continued growth and spread of English settlement led to rising anger among some Indian tribes. I say some Indian tribes because I think it's very important to recognize this is a very complex situation. It's not simply a matter of Indians versus English. Some tribes established very successful peace accords and profitable trade agreements with the English.

In other cases there was intense rivalries between tribes pitted them against each other. So it's a very complicated situation. But that said, there's no question that many of the Indians in New England began to resent the growing English population and its impact on their lives and their livelihoods. And of course land was the big issue. Only about 20 percent of

the land in New England land is actually good for farming. And with a fast-rising English population, this meant that all those children that were being born in the 1630s and 1640s are now coming of age, and they want farms.

On top of this growing pressure for land, Native Americans in Massachusetts faced mounting economic problems of their own. The fur trade was nearly all gone. They had pretty much hunted the beaver into extinction. The situation was especially bad for the Indians living near Plymouth. They were essentially hemmed in by English settlers. This is unlike the situation where most other Indians in New England that basically had lots of access to expanses of untouched land.

By the 1660s the one valuable resource that these Indians possessed was land which, of course, was a finite resource. Well, it's into this troubling situation that King Philip emerges. So who was King Philip? We've already clarified that he's not a European monarch. His real name was Metacom, or Metacomet. The name "King Philip" was actually an English invention. In fact it's a term of derision. It was an inverted kind of put down on him.

Metacom was the son of Massasoit, the Wampanoag chief who had befriended the Pilgrims way back in 1621. Metacom was born years later in 1638, which meant that he grew up right in the middle of this fast, quickly changing and very complex world of rivalries between various tribes and rivalries among the tribes with the English.

When Massasoit died 1661, his elder son Alexander succeeded him as Sachem, or chief. But then Alexander died in 1662. Many Wampanoags thought he'd been poisoned by the English, since he died very suddenly while attending a meeting with the English. We'll actually never know the answer to that question. In any case, his death meant that Metacom, age 24, became the Sachem. From all existing accounts, Metacom apparently filled the role of sachem quite well. He carried himself like a leader—with a very proud, almost haughty demeanor. In fact, he let it be known to the English that he considered himself the equal to King Charles II. He said that Charles was King in England and he was king in America. This claim largely explains the origin of his nickname, "King Philip."

Metacom, or Philip, had become the leader of a tribe in crisis. They faced severe economic hardship in the 1660s. Their one remaining resource was land. So in the late 1660s, they began to sell it. Lots of it. This led to huge losses of Wampanoag land. In many cases the English buyers took advantage of their desperate situation and drove the price down. They also encouraged the Indians to take out loans against their lands and then seized the land when the Indians could not pay up.

Tensions in Plymouth began to mount. In 1671 terrifying rumors spread throughout the colony that Philip was planning a revolt. In fact, there was a lot of evidence to suggest that this actually might have been the case. Many warriors had been gathering at Philip's settlement, a place called Mount Hope. The English officials of Plymouth took no chances and decided to crack down on Philip. They decided to humiliate him by forcing him to disarm, pay a fine of £100, and to pay an annual fee as a subject of the colony. The goal of this policy was basically to discredit him among his people. But it actually may have had the opposite effect. Philip was unbowed. He did two things. First, he began to rearm. And he did this by selling even more land. By 1673 nearly all available land was gone. You might ask the question, Was Philip was crazy, this shrinking piece of land that he has? He's not, because he's preparing for war, and it was a war that he planned to win. And if he did, he would drive the English out and get all the land back. In his mind, he was simply taking advantage of the English hunger for land, as well as their short-sightedness, because he's going to use the money gained from the land sales to buy guns and ammunition. Philip also began seeking alliances w/other tribes. This was not as easy as it sounds. As we noted earlier, there were many rivalries among the tribes. And many tribes had close ties with English for trade, as well as for protection

Well, Philip eventually launched his war in 1675. What started it? It began with a man named John Sassamon. Sassamon was an Indian who'd assimilated into English society. He'd converted to Christianity, learned English, and even attended Harvard College. At one point in the 1660s he served as Philip's interpreter. But the two had a falling out when Sassamon tried to defraud Philip in the late 1660s. Sassamon went to live among the English. He still had lots of interaction with the Wampanoags and, in mid-January 1675, he told Plymouth officials he'd learned that Philip was indeed

planning a war. Soon thereafter, Sassamon's body was found submerged in a local pond. He'd been murdered. The English immediately suspected that this was a revenge killing, revenge for Sassamon's turning informant to the English. They soon arrested three Wampanoags, including one of Philip's key advisors, and charged them with murder. They were subsequently tried and convicted. And on June 8, 1675, they were hanged at Plymouth. And these executions, as you might well imagine, enraged Philip's people, especially his young warriors.

King Philip's War began soon thereafter. The first major attack took place on June 20, 1675. Indians attacked the town of Swansea, Massachusetts. They burned initially a few outlying homesteads and then they laid siege to the town. On June 24, they attacked the town in force and killed 10. Well, alarm spread very quickly among the English throughout Plymouth colony. In fact, it also spread to nearby Massachusetts Bay colony. Officials there responded by sending troops to Plymouth to assist them. On June 28 a combined force of Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth soldiers destroyed Philip's Mount Hope settlement.

From here, the war escalated rapidly. Philip was soon joined by other tribes, including Nipmuk's in central Massachusetts, the Pocumtucks in western Massachusetts, the Abenakis in Maine, and eventually the Narragansetts in Rhode Island. What led to this rapid escalation and involvement of tribes far, far from Plymouth? There was lots of built up resentment among New England Indians, and they seemed to have sensed at this moment that this might be their last chance, last chance to drive off the English and to save their homeland. In the coming weeks, more attacks occurred. I'll just give you a couple of examples. On July 8, Middleborough and Dartmouth were attacked. On July 14 the town of Mendon was attacked. On August 2 Brookfield. A week later Lancaster. In early September, Deerfield, Hadley, and Northfield, Massachusetts, were attacked. In October, Springfield and Hatfield were attacked. By now the English in Massachusetts were in a complete and total panic. We can see this in their decision in Boston to round up several hundred Christian Indians living peacefully nearby. There is no evidence that these Indians posed any threat. They'd lived near Boston for years in peace and had developed close ties to the English. But in the midst of war, the English saw any and all Indians as a threat. So they rounded

them up, put them on boats, and dumped them on Deer Island in the Boston Harbor. And over that next winter, many of them would die of disease, starvation, and exposure.

We can also see the panic of the English in their decision to provoke the powerful Narragansett Indians to the south of them in nearby Rhode Island. Now the Narragansetts were rivals to the Wampanoags, so for the first few months of the war, they actually remained neutral. And this was extremely fortunate for the English because the Narragansetts were such a powerful tribe. And if they had joined with Philip at outset of the war, they could have helped them wipe out Plymouth and Boston. But they remained neutral. Be that as it may, by the middle of the fall of 1675, the English had come to suspect all Indians of hostile intent. They accused the Narragansetts of harboring hostile Wampanoags who had fled to their line and demanded that they turn them over. Well, the Narragansetts refused, so the English invaded Rhode Island in November. They burned Indian villages, and they caused many Narragansetts to flee to a swamp fortress in an area near present-day South Kingston, Rhode Island. On Dec 19, 1675, a combined force of Connecticut and Massachusetts militia attacked and set fire to this fortress, killing at least 300. It was a grisly replay of the Mystic Massacre of 1637.

By now, the war's become a New England-wide conflict. During the winter of 1675 and 1676 the Indians clearly had the upper hand. They attacked and destroyed many frontier towns. This included an attack on a town called Lancaster, Massachusetts. This was important for one reason. This town was wiped out on Feb 10, 1676. But one woman, named Mary Rowlandson, and her children were spared, and they were taken as captives. She eventually gains her freedom. And after the war she would write the famous *Captivity Narrative* detailing her ordeal, and it became America's first best-selling book. The attacks continued. In late February, Native American warriors attack sites just 10 miles from Boston. In March they attacked Plymouth Plantation. On March 29 they burned Providence, Rhode Island. So, overall, given all these listings of destroyed towns and attacks, how extensive was all this destruction? Well, by the spring of 1676 the line of English settlement that before the war reached all the way to the Connecticut River valley, had now retreated all the way back eastward to Concord, Massachusetts, just

outside Boston. And this retreat had caused thousands of refugees to stream eastward in total panic into the east coast towns.

But there was more going on here than just death and destruction. Scholars who have studied this war, in particular Jill Lepore who has written an excellent book on this called *The Name of War*. They note that these Indian attacks included an important element of what we would call psychological warfare. They knew how to unnerve the English. They taunted them as they attacked about their Christianity. They asked them as they were attacking, Where's your God now? Isn't your God going to come in and save you? They also targeted bibles. They tore up bibles and scattered them to the wind. They also destroyed churches as well.

And they did this because the Indians understood just how central Christianity was to these English colonies. They also, not just focusing on Christianity, they also attacked other symbols of English civilization. They burned their houses, a classic symbol of civilization. They tore down their fences. And they killed and maimed their cattle. They particularly hated the cattle, because cattle were allowed to roam freely, and they got into their corn and trampled their crops. Sometimes the Indians left notes that give us a clear insight into their mindset. One of these notes was actually tacked up onto a tree near a town called Medfield, Massachusetts. And they found it after the fight. It was clearly written by an Indian who had learned some English. And it reads, "Thou English man hath provoked us to anger and wrath, and we care not though we have war with you ... for there are many of us, 300 of which hath fought with you at this town. We have nothing but our lives to lose but thou hast many fair houses, cattle, and much good things." So you can see in this that they are aware of how to get to the English to point out that we can destroy all of your civilization.

To get a sense of the destruction and despair that's sweeping across New England, let's listen to another account, this one published by a man named Nathaniel Saltonstall in 1676, one of the first accounts of the war. And it's called *A True but Brief Account of our Losses sustained since this Cruel and Mischievous War Began*. Listen:

In Narraganset not one House left standing. At Warwick, but one. At Providence, not above three. At Potuxit, none left. Very few at Seaconicke. At Swansey, two, at most. Marlborough, wholly laid in Ashes, except for two or three Houses. Grantham and Nashaway, all ruined but one House or two. Many Houses burnt at Springfield, Scituate, Lancaster, Brookefield and Northampton. The greatest Part of Rehoboth and Taunton destroyed. Great Spoil made at Hadley, Hatfield, and Chelmsford. Deerfield wholly, and Westfield much ruined. At Sudbury, many Houses burnt, and some at Hingham, Weymouth, and Braintree. Besides particular Farms and Plantations, a great Number not to be reckoned up, wholly laid waste, or very much damnified.

So Saltonstall is laying out almost in list fashion the level of destruction that has taken place here. Then, Saltonstall goes on to describe the human toll. And note here the emphasis on Indian brutality. He's already trying to shape the characterization of the war before it's even finished.

And as to Persons, it is generally thought, that of the English there hath been lost, in all, Men, Women, and Children, above Eight Hundred since the War began: Of whom many have been destroyed with exquisite Torments, and most inhumane Barbarities; the Heathen rarely giving Quarter to those whom that they take, but if they were Women, they first forced them to satisfie their filthy Lusts and then murdered them; either cutting off the Head, ripping open the Belly, or scalping the Head of Skin and Hair and then hanging them up as Trophies.

You get a sense of the brutality and also what he's trying to convey here in terms of the difference between English and Indians.

This emphasis on Indian brutality and savagery ignored many of the atrocities committed by the English. We've already noted the massacre of the Narragansetts in the swamp. In another incident, just to name one, an English commander reported that he tied up an Indian woman and had her torn apart by dogs. Saltonstall's account, with its emphasis on Native brutality and savagery set the tone for all the written accounts of the war that

would follow after the war was done—and there were many of them. The English likely wrote these many accounts of the war for a number of reasons.

For one, the English were trying to make sense of this incredible devastation that has taken place. Another reason is they wanted to justify their behavior in the war. They essentially wrote that any of the acts of brutality on their part were purely in response to acts of brutality by the Indians. Finally, they wrote to absolve themselves of any responsibility for bringing on the war in the first place. And on this score, they actually had some good reason to present themselves as guiltless because in the aftermath of the war, King Charles II sent an investigator to find out what had been the cause of the war. And he ruled that the colonists were in fact to blame.

OK, back to the conflict. By spring of 1676 Philip had become a mythical figure among the English. They believed he was the mastermind, the one orchestrating all of these attacks. He was rumored to be everywhere, and there were many alleged sightings of him. Most of this was driven by panic. Very little of it was true. The warring Indian tribes were not that united, certainly not united under one person. And some of the Indians actually resented Philip. One actually tried to assassinate him during the war.

So what turned the course of the war in favor of the English colonists? The colonial militias eventually got their acts together, and they defeated the hostile tribes. They were successful essentially because they were more numerous, they were better armed, they were more ruthless, and they'd made alliances with several Indian tribes. In the summer of 1676 they began sweeping assaults on Indian villages. Thousands were killed. Thousands more were forced into exile. They took hundreds as prisoners, and many of these prisoners were immediately sold into slavery into places like Barbados.

The final events to this conflict took place in the late summer. On August 2, 1676, Captain Benjamin Church captured Philip's wife and son. Then on August 12 Philip was killed by an Indian under Church's command. Church then ordered Philip's body be beheaded and then drawn and quartered, torn into four pieces. And then Benjamin Church paraded triumphantly back to Plymouth with Philip's head on a pike. And that pike was placed in the town

square and left on display for more than 25 years. The war at this point was effectively over.

There's a remarkably poignant coincidence that accompanied Church's arrival in Plymouth. Purely by coincidence, he arrived on Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims had actually suspended Thanksgiving the year before because of the war. Now they resumed it because they wanted to celebrate their victory in the war. Think for a moment about how this changes our image of that first Thanksgiving in 1621. We already know from that earlier lecture on the Great Epidemic that Massasoit, Philip's father, had sought an alliance with the English in 1621. He and the Wampanoags helped the Plymouth colony to survive in those early years, and so they were invited to join that first Thanksgiving in 1621. That celebration, that very moment, suggested there was a really strong potential for harmony between Indians and Europeans. But then only one generation later Philip was killed. And what about his 9-year-old son? He was sold into slavery in Barbados—all this in just three generations covering only 55 years.

What's the significance of King Philip's War. Why is it a turning point? First of all, it's significant because of its level of violence. There was extraordinary violence and brutality on both sides. Most of the 1000's killed on both sides were non-combatants, including a lot of women and children. There were also many incidents on both sides of prisoners being tortured and then killed. Many stories of the mutilation of bodies. It was a real spiral of violence in which each side justified their savagery as being provoked by the other side. We wouldn't do this, but they're doing it. What's remarkable, when you look at the whole course of the war, is how close the Indians came to forcing the abandonment of New England. There was a huge amount of property lost. Fifty of the 100 towns in New England were attacked. A third of them were badly damaged or destroyed. And the human toll? We don't have exact numbers but it's estimated the English lost about 1, 200 people, and Native Americans lost 3,700.

Another significance of King Philip's War: The result for Native Americans was widespread devastation. The tribes in New England were severely weakened in the aftermath of the war. All the negative trends that had been developing before the war now accelerated: English population continued

to grow. The native population continued to decline, largely due to disease. They continued to lose more of their land. And English settlements began to push Indians further and further westward. For the English, this now meant that the Indians no longer posed a major threat to British colonization in North America, at least their part of North America. They could proceed unhindered.

King Philip's War is a good example of the "messiness" of history, that history is often full of uncomfortable truths. Historian Nathaniel Philbrick, in his book *Mayflower* captured this notion very succinctly in his summation of the war. He wrote, "It had taken 56 years [since the Pilgrim arrival] to unfold, but one people's quest for freedom had resulted in the conquest and enslavement of another."

Another significance of this war is that it spurred greater unity among the colonists. This was a regional war crossed colonial boundaries, so it became a shared experience that contributed to the emergence of an American identity, one that emphasized a frontier narrative and also providentialism. These ideas would greatly set the Americans apart from their English cousins in the years to come.

A final significance, perhaps the most important of all, concerned the memory of the war. How was King Philip's war remembered? Well, after that initial burst of writing that we've already noted, King Philip's War was largely forgotten for a century. Then at the Centennial, in 1775 to 1776, there were many commemorations of the war. But, interestingly, the writers of these commemorations reshaped the King Philip story to fit the Revolutionary War setting. They did this by equating directly the colonists' heroic struggle in the 1670s against King Philip and the savage Indians, with the colonists' heroic struggle in the 1770s against King George and his savage British soldiers. The big change, thought, came in the 19th century. In 1814, the famous writer Washington Irving published an essay "Philip of Pokanoket." It depicted Philip as a hero, as a true patriot, as a man who fought to defend his people to the end. This essay triggered a booming interest in all things King Philip. Years later in 1829, a playwright named John Augustus Stone wrote a play called "Metamora" or "The Last of the Wampanoags" Notice he's changed the name a little bit. It's Metacom. The play depicted Philip

as a tragic hero. During this play he gives a series of inspiring speeches about duty, honor, and sacrifice. The play starred the most famous actor in America, Edwin Forest, and it became a smashing success. It played for decades and was probably the most performed play 19th-century America. And it inspired many imitations, many spinoffs: dime novels, songs, poems, endless fascination with King Philip.

Well, what's going on here? How does the demon of one century become the hero of another? What we're seeing here is the power of historical memory. Memory is always shaped to a society's needs. Think of the way that George Washington was transformed into a saint after his death. The man, he never told a lie. Americans at the time in the early republic wanted a mythical founding father. So what did America need in the 19th century that explains this astonishing transformation of King Philip? Well, there were two things happening simultaneously in mid-19th-century America relating to Indians. And they seemed upon close inspection to contradict each other. On the one hand, American culture in the mid-19th century was filled with images demonizing Indians out there in the West as bloodthirsty savages who were hopelessly primitive and basically were just obstacles to American expansion into the West

But at the same time, there's a powerful trend at work that celebrated and reified Indians as ideal symbols of masculinity, strength, independence, and freedom. This is sometimes called the "noble savage" image. Significantly it mainly focused on Indians long gone, Indians like Philip—Indians who no longer posed a threat. This image became increasingly important as Americans become more urban and became more modern. Think about how Indian imagery is everywhere in this period (and beyond), well into the 20th and 21st centuries. Indians were used as symbols and logos for clubs. They were used in —advertising, cigars stores, on the backs of nickels, names of towns, paintings and sculpture—you name it. King Philip's War played a big role in the development of this powerful "noble savage" theme.

Well, that does it for King Philip's War. In our next lecture, we'll explore the story of John Peter Zenger and the trial that led to expanding notions of freedom of the press in American, an idea eventually enshrined in the First Amendment. Thank you.

1735 Freedom of the Press—The Zenger Trial

Lecture 6

The 1735 libel trial of John Peter Zenger helped establish one of the most important founding principles of American liberty. Zenger and his colleagues at the *New-York Weekly Journal* didn't see themselves as pioneers in expanding human freedoms; they were merely waging a local political war on an abusive governor. But without meaning to, Zenger and his friends played a key role in pushing America to a new definition of freedom of the press.

England had probably the freest press in the world in the 16th and 17th centuries, but that's a relative judgment. British law required strict licensing of printers, thereby controlling what was printed. More significant were strict laws criminalizing “seditious libel”—broadly defined as any statement that criticized government officials and undermined the authority and reputation of the government. This was understood as the law in colonial America as well.

John Peter Zenger immigrated to America at the age of 13 and was apprenticed to the city's only printer, William Bradford. In 1726, he opened his own shop, but Bradford still had all of the business. He was still struggling in 1733 when he was approached by James Alexander and William Smith with a proposal to begin publishing a newspaper. These men were the political enemies of the new colonial governor, William Cosby, and wanted a newspaper in which to publish their criticisms of him. Zenger agreed, and so was born the *New-York Weekly Journal*.

Like many colonial governors, Cosby came from an aristocratic background and was well-connected, ambitious, and corrupt. Unlike most others, he was also stupid, arrogant, haughty, and dismissive. It did not take him long to alienate the people of New York. He placed his favorites in key posts; other jobs he sold to the highest bidder. When the court's chief justice, Lewis Morris, refused to bring a profitable case of Cosby's to trial in 1733, Cosby fired him. Opposition to Cosby's behavior grew, but Cosby controlled the colony's only newspaper, the *New-York Gazette*, printed by William Bradford.

The *New-York Weekly Journal* would be America's first oppositional newspaper. The first issue came out on November 5, 1733. It kept up a steady stream of criticism of Cosby, especially his attempt to rig the recent assembly elections. Some of this was done through serious prose, some through satire and ridicule. The combined effect was to portray the governor as both a fool and a tyrant. Cosby tried to bring Zenger before a grand jury for seditious libel, but twice the jury declined. Cosby then bypassed the grand jury and got his council to order the sheriff to arrest Zenger.

“Nature and the laws of our country have given us a right, the Liberty both of exposing and opposing arbitrary power ... by speaking and writing Truth.”

James Alexander and William Smith were excellent lawyers, and they took up Zenger's case. On April 15, 1735, they opened the proceedings by arguing that the justices were biased

and ought not to hear the case. The justices disbarred Alexander and Smith and appointed John Chambers, a Cosby crony, as Zenger's council. But Chambers would act with surprising independence.

The trial began on August 4, 1735. By law, the jury's role was strictly limited to deciding if the defendant published the materials in question, not whether that material was true, false, or libelous. Only the (pro-Cosby) judges could rule on the matter of the law.

In a beautifully orchestrated piece of courtroom theater, Chambers brought in Andrew Hamilton, a famous lawyer from Philadelphia, to assist in Zenger's defense. Hamilton immediately conceded that Zenger had printed the paper, but he went on to argue that, according to the wording of the prosecutor's own indictment, Zenger was not guilty unless his paper had printed “a certain false, malicious, and seditious scandalous libel,” and that was what the jury should determine.

What started as a slam dunk for the prosecution now turned into a real courtroom battle. Hamilton closed with what would become famous words:

The question before the court and you gentlemen of the jury is not of small nor private concern; it is not the cause of a poor printer. ... It may in its consequence affect every freeman that lives under a British government on the main of America ... securing to ourselves, our posterity, and our neighbors that to which Nature and the laws of our country have given us a right, the Liberty both of exposing and opposing arbitrary power ... by speaking and writing Truth.

The jury took 10 minutes to deliberate, then returned a verdict of not guilty.

The Zenger case did not establish any new law or new legal precedent. But it did popularize three powerful ideas: that freedom of the press is essential to the protection of liberty; that statements that are true cannot be libelous; and that a jury should decide both the facts and the law in trials. In making these points, Andrew Hamilton did not argue law but political philosophy—that America was a different land from Great Britain, with different needs. With the protection of Parliament so far away, Americans needed to be able to criticize their government to protect themselves from oppressive and corrupt officials.

These ideas were popularized by *A Brief Narrative of the Case and Tryal of John Peter Zenger*, ghost written by Alexander in Zenger's name. Published in 1736, it became one of the most widely read publications in the colonies before the Revolution. Later colonial editors operated largely with a free hand as they denounced British colonial officials, Parliament, and eventually the king, in blistering terms.

The Zenger trial shaped the writing of the Constitution because one of the lessons drawn from the trial was the need for an independent judiciary and the separation of powers. The Zenger trial also left a lasting impression on Americans of the need for trial by jury and the right to legal counsel. The biggest lesson, of course, was freedom of the press. Challenges to freedom of the press would, of course, arise in nearly every succeeding generation, but overall the trend in the 19th and 20th century was toward an ever-broadening understanding of the idea. ■

Suggested Reading

Finkelman and Zenger, *A Brief Narrative of the Case and Tryal of John Peter Zenger*.

Questions to Consider

1. Is freedom of the press essential to the preservation of liberty?
2. How has freedom of the press influenced American history?

1735 Freedom of the Press—The Zenger Trial

Lecture 6—Transcript

Welcome back. Time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Today we look at the 1735 trial of John Peter Zenger that helped establish the principle of freedom of the press. But before we do that, let's stop and think about how many important moments in American history have derived from or somehow involved the freedom of the press.

Think about the abolitionist press and the eventual end of slavery. Muckrakers at the turn of the late 19th, early 20th century and how they exposed the abuses by big business. The Pentagon Papers and how that led to the withdrawal of the U.S. military from Vietnam. And then shortly thereafter, the Watergate investigation and the resignation of President Richard Nixon. These are just a few examples of the central role a free press has played in American history. So it raises a question. Two questions. How did this idea get enshrined in the First Amendment? And secondly, how did it come to be seen as a central principle of American democracy? Well, it's a long and fascinating story, but it began with the arrest and prosecution of a little known New York printer in 1735.

But before we go into the details of the famous Zenger Trial let's establish our objectives for this lecture. We'll basically focus on four things. First, we'll look briefly at the history of Freedom of the Press before 1735. Next, we'll examine the fractious politics of New York in the 1730s that landed John Peter Zenger in jail. Then we'll examine and we'll detail the famous trial that ensued after his arrest and how it eventually established the principle of Freedom of the Press. Finally, we examine this idea of a Free Press and how it became a central element of the Bill of Rights and how it evolved gradually over the next few centuries.

OK, let's get started by looking briefly at the history of Freedom of the Press before 1735. England probably had the freest press in the world in the 16th and 17th centuries. But of course that's a relative term. For most of that period, British law required strict licensing of printers as a way to control what they published in books, pamphlets, and newspapers. Most significant, however, were strict laws making "seditious libel" a crime. Seditious libel

was broadly defined as any statement that criticized the government or government officials and somehow undermined the authority and reputation of the government—basically [anything that] made the government look bad. In 1704, for example, a famous British justice declared that seditious libel prosecutions were essential because “it is very necessary for all governments that the people should have a good opinion of it.” The truthfulness or accuracy of a statement was no defense. In fact, the law in these days considered truthful statements to be worse than lies—because they were true! Writers, printers, and editors found guilty of seditious libel faced a fine, imprisonment, or both. This understanding of sharply limited press in terms of its freedom was, of course, the norm in colonial America where British law held sway.

OK, so with this quick overview of the history of freedom of the press before 1735 complete, now let’s move on to the fractious politics in New York in the 1730s that landed Zenger in jail. First off, who was John Peter Zenger? He was born in 1697 in Germany and in 1710, at the age of 13, he came to America with his parents. They landed in New York. Zenger as a teenager was soon apprenticed to the city’s one printer, William Bradford. After eight years he completed his apprenticeship, he married, and then he moved away for a time. He tried to establish himself as a printer in Maryland. But that didn’t work out. When his wife died, and his printing venture failed, Zenger came back to New York. He remarried and, in 1726, he opened a small print shop. Unfortunately for him, his old boss, William Bradford, basically had a monopoly on all the colonies printing business. So Zenger got by printing stationary, small pamphlets, and a lot of religious tracts. In 1733 he was still struggling when he was approached by several men to begin publishing a newspaper. They were the political enemies of the new colonial governor, and they wanted a newspaper in which to publish their criticisms of him. Zenger saw this as a great opportunity, and he agreed and so was born the *New York Weekly Journal*. Zenger would soon find himself embroiled in the bitter political feud that was then brewing in New York. That all started few years earlier back in 1731 when the colonial governor died.

In those days the slowness of communication and transportation meant that the replacement governor did not arrive in New York until August 1732. In the meantime, a veteran local official filled in as interim governor. His

name was Rip Van Dam, that old Dutch man. Great name, isn't it? Rip Van Dam. He was a 72-year-old Dutch merchant and longtime member of the provincial council, basically a highly esteemed figure in the colony. The new governor, William Cosby, eventually arrived, as I noted, in August of 1732. William Cosby. I'll bet you didn't know New York once had a governor named Bill Cosby. Well it's true. Who was this guy? Like many colonial governors, Cosby was of aristocratic background. He was well-connected in the political world back in London. He was ambitious, and he was also thoroughly corrupt. The goal of most colonial governors in this period—I mean nobody really wants these jobs except that it was a way to get rich, and then as soon as you got rich, you get out and get back to London and use your connections to get a better job in the homeland. Cosby took this attitude basically to a new level. We can see this from his previous job that he held in the British colonial system. He was the governor of a small Mediterranean island, the island of Minorca, and there he got into trouble for defrauding a merchant of his property. Cosby was subsequently removed the post and was ordered to pay a huge fine of £10,000. So Cosby had this track record of milking the system essentially. And to make it worse, Cosby was not only corrupt, he was apparently not very bright. He was stupid, he was arrogant, he was haughty, and he was dismissive—not exactly skills that would do well in local politics.

It took Cosby very little time to alienate most of the people in New York. For example, when the colonial assembly voted him a gift of £750, which was a lot of money in those days, Cosby denounced it as inadequate. So they raised it to £1000. Of course he was probably upset even at that. Cosby then soon began to place favorites in key posts, including his son. Other jobs he simply sold to the highest bidder. Then controversy really exploded over the matter of the governor's salary. It was customary in those days for an interim governor to hand over to the incoming governor a portion of the governor's salary he had earned while in office, usually about half the salary. Again, this was custom. It really wasn't law. Cosby, when he arrived in the colony, demanded rather abruptly, Rip Van Dam, the interim governor, turn over half the salary. Van Dam was offended and therefore refused this haughty demand that was made of him. Cosby now was enraged, and he began to pursue legal action. But he knew given the climate there that no jury was going to rule in his favor. So, he came up with a clever maneuver and had the case heard by

the colony's three justices of the Supreme Court. And that would mean there would be no jury.

The case came before the court in April 1733. And when it did, chief justice of the court, a man named Lewis Morris, declared the court actually had no right to hear the case, and he dismissed it. Now you can imagine this angered Governor Cosby, so he demanded that Morris give him an answer. Why did you do this? Well Morris wrote a vigorous dissent and then didn't just hand it off to Cosby. He actually hired John Peter Zenger to publish it and distribute it around the city. This was obviously provocation. In response, Cosby then fired Morris from his post as chief justice. Well, you can imagine, Cosby's heavy-handed tactics stirred a lot of opposition to him. And leading the opposition were Lewis Morris, the guy he just fired, Rip Van Dam, the former interim governor, and two lawyers, one named James Alexander and the other named William Smith. Together they created something they called the "Popular Party" to oppose Cosby and his legions of loyal followers. In the elections that fall of 1733, Lewis Morris and his son and a number of other anti-Cosby-ites won seats in the New York Colonial Assembly. And during this election Cosby tried to rig the vote. He tried to exclude a lot of voters and had only his people vote. Essentially nothing is beneath him and opposition to him continued to grow.

Cosby, however, had one advantage. He controlled the only newspaper in the colony. This is Bradford's newspaper, called the *New York Gazette*. It was full of pro-Cosby coverage. That's because Bradford had a big contract to print all the official publications. So let's listen to the style of the coverage, essentially what's in this newspaper published by William Bradford, including a lot of poetry that sort of praised him. You get a sense of how sort of lame this poetry is. "Cosby the mild, the happy, good and great, The strongest guard of our little state." That was in one of the editions of the *New York Gazette*. Not exactly the greatest of poetry. And it indicated that kind of lackey attitude that he had cultivated in the colony.

To combat this pro-Cosby propaganda, Cosby's opponents established the *New York Weekly Journal*. Zenger would print it, but the primary writers were James Alexander and William Smith. It became America's first oppositional newspaper. It came out on November 5, 1733. And not

surprisingly, it was very critical of Cosby, especially his attempt to rig the recent election. Zenger, Alexander, and Smith very likely, because they were anticipating some kind of a crack down or a legal confrontation with the governor, frequently defended in these early issues their right to criticize the government.

Let's listen to what Alexander wrote in just the second edition of the John Peter Zenger's paper. He wrote,

The loss of liberty in general would soon follow the suppression of the liberty of the press; for it is an essential branch of liberty, so perhaps it is the best preservative of the whole. Even a restraint of the press would have a fatal influence. No nation ancient or modern ever lost the liberty of freely speaking, writing, or publishing their sentiments, but forthwith lost their liberty in general and became slaves.

Alexander also argued (in this same piece) that not only must truthful criticism be allowed, but also occasional falsehoods. He wrote this is essentially a small price to pay, "Very few good ministers can be hurt by falsehood, but many wicked ones by reasonable truth." This early defense of their right to criticize was in some ways not a bold statement of the freedom of the press, so much it is as a covering of themselves. And it's a bit of hyperbole. They're probably trying to insulate themselves and not really establish a new precedent and, in fact, we should probably emphasize that the men behind the *New York Journal* don't see themselves as pioneers in expanding the freedom of the press. They are really just waging a local political war on an abusive governor. But as I like to say, history is the study of surprises. As it turns out, without meaning to, John Peter Zenger and his friends will soon play a key role in pushing America to a new definition of freedom of the press.

In the meantime, Zenger's paper kept up a steady criticism of Cosby. Some of this was done through serious prose, but a lot took the form of satire and ridicule. The combined effect was to portray the governor both as a fool and as a tyrant. As you can imagine, Cosby did not wait long to try to shut down Zenger's paper. He tried it first in January of 1734, soon after it started

publication. He got the chief justice of the colony's Supreme Court, who was a loyal Cosby man, to ask the grand jury to indict Zenger for seditious libel. Seditious libel, remember, was this very vague definition basically that any statement that was critical of the government was considered seditious libel. But because this had to go before the grand jury, they declined the request—a sign of just how unpopular this new governor had become. Cosby tried again in October 1734, but again the grand jury declined, and they noted that they argued that they didn't have enough evidence.

Cosby was determined. He basically got his Colonial Council to order several particularly offensive editions of the *New York Weekly Journal* be—let's listen to the words exactly of his statement (it'll give you a sense of Cosby's wrath) that they “be burnt by the ... Hangman, as containing in them many Things derogatory of the Dignity of His Majesty's Government.” Well, the *New York Journal* was not deterred, and they kept up their steady stream of criticism, “Only the wicked Governours of Men dread what is said of them.” Cosby then bypassed the Grand Jury because he was getting nowhere with them, and he got his Council to order the sheriff to arrest Zenger, and here's the charge: “for printing and publishing several Seditious Libels ... as having in them many Things, tending to raise Factions and Tumults, among the People of this Province, inflaming their minds with Contempt of His Majesty's Government, and greatly disturbing the Peace thereof.”

So Zenger's in trouble. They are accusing Zenger's paper was a threat to public order; it was dividing the public and undermining the government's authority. Zenger was indeed arrested on November 17, 1734, and thrown in jail. The law required that a bail be set that was within the means of the person thrown in jail. But the judge set bail at £400—10 times Zenger's personal worth. The judge of course was a loyal Cosby-ite. Zenger couldn't pay, so he ended up spending eight months in jail. Now the people that he was working with, Morris and Alexander, could have easily posted his bail, but they recognized the public relations value of having Zenger remain in jail. The *New York Weekly Journal*—even with Zenger in jail—missed only one issue, and that was the week he got arrested. It then quickly resumed. His wife Anna played a key role in keeping the paper running. She and her sons basically took over the press, and then they communicated with Zenger

on a regular basis through a small hole in the door of his cell. And he gave them instructions.

So now—on to the trial. James Alexander and William Smith were excellent lawyers, and they took up Zenger’s case. Not surprisingly, Cosby arranged for the trial to take place before the pro-Cosby justices of the Supreme Court. On April 15, 1735, Alexander and Smith opened the proceedings by arguing that the justices were biased and that they shouldn’t hear the case at all. They asked them to recuse themselves. Instead, the justices, in rather quick order, barred them from practicing law. This action only served to convince still more New Yorkers that Cosby was a tyrant willing to trash the liberties of those who opposed him. In their place, the court appointed a lawyer named John Chambers—a Cosby appointee. This really looked bad for Zenger. He lost his lawyers and now he has a Cosby-friendly lawyer taking his case. But John Chambers actually acted—to everybody’s surprise—with surprising independence. When the court clerk, who was another Cosby appointee, submitted a list of potential jurors that had mostly pro-Cosby people on it, Chambers refused to accept it. Eventually, the jury was drawn from all eligible men in the colony. This was critical for the Zenger case because it was not biased.

The trial finally started on August 4, 1735, to be precise. To most observers, the outcome seemed obvious. And here we need to take a moment to look briefly at the key point in British cases of seditious libel, how this usually works. The jury’s role was strictly limited to deciding if the defendant published the materials in question. They were not to decide if that material itself was true, false, or libelous. If the evidence proved the defendant published the material, that he literally churned it out, then they had to find him guilty. So it’s a really simple question before the jury. The judge would then decide if the content of the documents in question was libelous or not. In other words, the jury was limited to deciding the facts of the case. The judge would then rule on the matter of law pertaining to the case. So in the case of Zenger, all the prosecution had to do was prove that Zenger printed the material. And since his name appeared in every issue of the *Journal*, this was not very hard to do. Then the pro-Cosby justices would certainly deem the material in question libelous and off to prison Zenger would go.

OK, back to the trial. The prosecution, headed by the colony's attorney general, began the proceedings by reading a series of offensive passages from Zenger's newspaper. Then he went on to say, "Libeling has always been discouraged as a thing that tends to create differences among men, ill blood among the people, and oftentimes great bloodshed between the party libeling and the party libeled."

Then he reminded the jury of their very limited task—deciding only if Zenger had published the material in question. Then it came time for the defense. John Chambers rose and gave a brief address about libel. He argued that there was no proof that anyone had been libeled. And then he sat down. Basically at this level in terms of the law, he really didn't have much of a case. At this moment the whole situation changes rather suddenly because there's a carefully orchestrated dramatic moment about to unfold. As Chambers sits down, an elderly man arises in the courtroom and announces that he wishes to join Zenger's defense. This was Andrew Hamilton, a famous lawyer from Philadelphia, probably the most famous lawyer in the colonies. And I should point out right now, he's not related to Alexander Hamilton. This Hamilton had been secretly invited by Zenger's disbarred attorneys, and they gave him all their legal preparation for the case. The chief justice was so flummoxed by this sudden appearance of Hamilton, this star, that he didn't know what to do. And to many people's surprise, he actually allowed Hamilton to join the defense. He said, OK, sure. You can join the defense.

What followed was an extraordinary exhibition of legal theater. The prosecutor stood at this moment to call his first witness who would testify that Zenger was indeed the publisher of these works. But Hamilton arose and interrupted and said, "I'll save Mr. Attorney the Trouble of examining his Witnesses to that Point; and I do (for my Client) confess, that he both printed and published the two News Papers set forth in the Information [evidence], and I hope in so doing he has committed no crime." This was a stunning admission, because it appeared to concede the entire case. So the attorney general dismissed his witnesses and asked the judge to send the case to the jury. And just in case, he reminded the jury that they must find Zenger guilty because he'd admitted that he printed the offensive materials.

But again Hamilton interjected. The jury, he said, cannot find Zenger guilty. The mere publishing of objectionable words is not libel. As he said, “The Words themselves must be libelous, that is, false, scandalous, and seditious or else we are not guilty.” And here Hamilton was holding the attorney general to his own words, for Zenger’s indictment charged that he’d published “a certain false, malicious, and seditious scandalous libel.” Now, Hamilton does not have any English law on his side. As we noted at the start of this lecture, there was a long tradition in English law of treating speech that was critical of the government as libel—even if it was true. The attorney general knows he has the law on his side at this point. As we noted at the start of this lecture, there’s a long tradition in English law treating speech that was critical of the government was libelous, seditious libel, even if it’s true. The Justices of the Supreme Court know the law is on the side of the prosecution and their good friend, Governor Cosby. But Hamilton had made a calculated decision to appeal to the jury. He was determined to convince the jury that they had the right to render what they called a general verdict, not simply on the facts of whether Zenger had published the material or not but whether it constituted libel. In the law, this is called “jury nullification.” A jury rejects the prosecution’s case because they find the whole proceeding unjust and unfair.

Well, what had started out as essentially a slam dunk for the prosecution now turned into a real courtroom battle. Back and forth it went between the prosecutor and the defending attorney as they argue their positions. Hamilton gradually focused increasingly on the question of truth. He asks the court to allow him to prove that nothing Zenger published was false and therefore it could not be libelous. The Court refused. So then Hamilton rather dramatically charged that this was suppression of evidence. He then turned to the jury and said, evidence that is suppressed should be considered evidence. This is rather bold. Think about how the other attorneys had been disbarred. The attorney general, however, kept arguing that the case was over. Zenger had admitted that he had printed the material. It should essentially be a matter of case closed.

Out of options, Hamilton then closed with what became very, very famous words in American jurisprudence. Let’s listen.

The question before the Court and you Gentlemen of the Jury, is not of small nor private Concern; it is not the Cause of a poor Printer, nor of New York alone, which you are now trying: No! It may in its Consequence, affect every Freeman that lives under a British Government on the main of America. It is the best Cause. It is the Cause of Liberty; and I make no Doubt but your upright Conduct, this Day, will not only entitle you to the Love and Esteem of your Fellow-Citizens; but every Man who prefers Freedom to a life of slavery will bless and honour You, as Men who have baffled the Attempt of Tyranny; and by an impartial and uncorrupt Verdict, have laid a noble Foundation for securing to ourselves, our Posterity, and our Neighbours, That, to which Nature and the Laws of our Country have given us a Right,—the Liberty—both of exposing and opposing arbitrary Power ... by speaking and writing Truth.

The jury then retired. They came back only 10 minutes later. The Prosecution assumed this was a good sign. They came back so quickly. But the verdict was “Not guilty.” The courtroom exploded in cheers and celebration. That night Zenger’s supporters had a gala dinner in honor of Hamilton at the Black Horse Tavern. Later the city [of New York] would make Hamilton an honorary citizen. Of course, Zenger didn’t get to go to the party. He was still in jail. Zenger got out of jail the next day.

So what’s the rest of the story? The rest of the story is this. Governor Cosby died a short time afterward in 1736. Andrew Hamilton went back to Philadelphia. Then he died in 1741. Alexander and Smith, the two attorneys were both reinstated to the bar. Zenger went back to his printing trade, and he kept his *New York Journal* alive. He eventually scored a very lucrative contract as New York’s official printer. The next year he won the same kind of contract for the colony of New Jersey. Zenger died in 1746 at the age of 49. And after that, his wife kept the *Journal* going until 1751. But, sadly, subscriptions dried up, and the newspaper went under. It’s kind of a sad end for such a significant newspaper in American History.

Well, we now need to determine how and to what extent the Zenger trial played a role in developing what became the widely cherished principle of

freedom of the press and, by extension, freedom of speech. So what was the trial's ultimate significance? Well, let's be clear on one thing. It did not establish any new law or new legal precedent. But it did popularize three powerful ideas. First, that freedom of the press was essential to the protection of liberty. Second, that statements that are true cannot be libelous. And third, that a jury should decide both the facts and the law in libel cases.

In making these points, Andrew Hamilton did not argue law, but basically political philosophy. This is another example of how American in the 18th century was becoming different from Great Britain—just like Roger Williams and his espousal of religious freedom. In fact, Hamilton made this a central point in his argument. He said British conceptions of libel were not applicable in the American context. Prosecutions for seditious libel might be needed in England to protect the king from criticism that could undermine his authority. But seditious libel prosecutions in the colonies threatened liberty, because colonial officials were so far from the oversight of king and parliament that Americans needed the right to criticize their government to protect themselves from oppressive and corrupt officials.

So how were these ideas popularized? James Alexander, soon after the trial, ghost wrote under Zenger's name a short book entitled, *A Brief Narrative of the Case and Tryal of John Peter Zenger*, which he published in 1736. It very quickly became one of the most widely read publications in the colonies before the Revolution. The *Narrative* went through many printings and 14 editions. It also generated a lot of published commentary in both Britain and the colonies. Ben Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*, for example, published four articles written by James Alexander in response to an essay published elsewhere that criticized the *Narrative* and the outcome of the trial. These publications popularized and spread the idea of freedom of the press. We can see this in the fact that after the Zenger trial colonial governors were very reluctant to pursue seditious libel prosecutions. There were almost none. They knew it was nearly impossible to get a jury to convict. Colonial editors, especially in the heated atmosphere of the 1760s and 1770s, operated largely with a free hand as they denounced British colonial officials, parliament, and then eventually the king, in blistering terms. So even though the law regarding seditious libel remained unchanged, the political culture of the colonies had changed considerably—thanks to the trial of John Peter Zenger.

Governor Morris, one of the key Founding Fathers and one of the architects of the Constitution, later wrote a book about the trial, and reflected that: “The trial of Zenger in 1735 was the germ of American freedom, the morning star of that liberty which subsequently revolutionized America.”

Specifically, the Zenger trial shaped the writing of the Constitution, because one of the lessons drawn from the trial was the need for an independent judiciary and for the separation of powers between the branches of government. The Zenger trial then played a key role in the debates over the Bill of Rights. The Zenger trial left a lasting impression on Americans of the need for trial by jury and the right to legal counsel. The biggest lesson, of course, was freedom of the press. The First Amendment declared, “Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech or of the press.” Now the full meaning of these words was not clear in 1791, and it would take decades for Americans to sort out exactly what “freedom of the press” meant.

In fact, only seven years after the ratification of the Bill of Rights, Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts. The Sedition Act (1798) gave the government sweeping powers to prosecute newspaper editors for publishing words critical of the government. But as a measure of the influence of Zenger, the government actually used the law only a few dozen times and managed to get only ten convictions. And then in 1801, only a little more than two years after it was passed, Congress let the law expire. Not surprisingly, throughout the debate over the sedition law, critics of the law frequently cited the Zenger case. Let’s listen to legal scholar Paul Finkelman as he describes the larger significance of the Zenger case:

What is most important about the Zenger legacy is not that it brought an immediate and total change in the law of libel—it did not—but rather that in the Revolutionary and early national period, it was always there as a beacon for those who were gradually developing an ideology of freedom of expression.

Challenges to freedom of the press would, of course, arise in nearly every succeeding generation, but overall the trend in the 19th and 20th century was toward an ever-broadening understanding of the idea. And as with the popularization of Roger Williams’s idea of religious liberty, the idea that

a free and unfettered press is essential to a healthy democracy has spread internationally. Of course, there have been mixed results on this score. Nonetheless, the ideal has been established.

Well, we'll have to leave it there in this discussion of the Zenger trial and the origins of the principle of freedom of the press. For our next lecture we'll jump ahead to the 1770s where we'll discuss three turning points, the first of which is, the Boston Tea Party.

Until then.

1773 Liberty! The Boston Tea Party

Lecture 7

Hindsight can be deceptive. From our vantage, we tend to think of the American Revolution as inevitable. But the truth is that, as little as two years before the outbreak of the war, few Americans were thinking in terms of independence. Up to that point, most settlers had been content citizens of the British government. The turning point toward revolution was the Boston Tea Party, when the Crown could no longer afford, politically or financially, to let the reins of government hang loose. Only then was conflict inevitable.

The story of the Boston Tea Party starts in 1763, at the end of Seven Years' War (or French and Indian War). England's treasury was empty, and the only option for refilling it was to raise tax revenue from the colonies. This ended England's longstanding policy of salutary neglect toward its colonies.

In 1763, most American colonists were not interested in independence, nor were they long-suffering victims of British tyranny. The 1765 Stamp Act—sweeping consumption tax on newspapers, legal documents, and all printed goods, even playing cards—sparked the first widespread outrage and organized resistance in colonial history. This included the formation of Sons of Liberty groups throughout the colonies. Parliament repealed the hated act but passed the Declaratory Act to make it clear they had the right to make laws affecting the colonies “in all cases whatsoever.”

Parliament also began to crack down on smuggling and move more troops from the American frontier to seaport cities. This led to many confrontations, the worst of which was the 1770 Boston Massacre. But even so, few colonists were demanding independence. Instead, events fell into a pattern: Parliament passed a new law; the colonists protested; and the matter faded away until the next law was passed. Meanwhile, the British government continued to act with leniency: It arrested no leaders, outlawed no protest organizations, closed no newspapers, and dissolved no colonial assemblies.

All this changed with the 1773 Tea Act. Parliament thought it had a win-win-win situation for itself, the colonists, and the struggling East India Company: Grant the company a monopoly on the tea trade to the colonies, institute a small tax on that trade to refill the Crown's coffers, and give the colonists good tea that was still cheaper than what they could get from smugglers. But the jaded colonists saw this as a scheme to establish taxation without representation and special monopolies.

Samuel Adams, a Boston pro-independence politician, saw the Tea Act as his chance to rally the colonists to his cause. He and John Hancock persuaded the local Sons of Liberty to prevent the tea ship *Dartmouth* from unloading its cargo. At some point, radicals within the Sons of Liberty decided the time had come for more extreme action. On Dec. 16, 1773, about 120 men converged on the *Eleanor*, the *Beaver*, and the *Dartmouth* and dumped a shipment of tea worth \$1,000,000 in today's money into Boston Harbor.

Even the moderates in Parliament demanded harsh retaliation. King George III agreed: "The die is now cast. The colonies must either submit or triumph." Parliament passed a series of laws in early 1774 that colonists dubbed the Intolerable Acts, reorganizing the Massachusetts government and placing most officials under direct control of the Crown.

The Massachusetts Sons of Liberty whipped up support in other colonies, and soon events began to move in unprecedented directions. In September 1774, the First Continental Congress denounced the Intolerable Acts, called



The 1773 Tea Act provoked the colonists into open defiance and rebellion, including attacks on individual tax collectors.

for the creation of a colony-wide government, and established a boycott of British goods. Accordingly, the Crown instructed officials in Massachusetts to snuff out the rebellion there. Massachusetts formed the Provincial Congress to coordinate resistance, including military resistance.

On April 19, 1775, General Thomas Gage, governor of Massachusetts, dispatched a force to Concord to investigate reports of a weapons stockpile. The result was the battle of Lexington and Concord. No one knew it at time, but they'd just fired the first shots of the American Revolution. ■

Suggested Reading

Carp, *Defiance of the Patriots*.

Ferling, *Almost A Miracle*.

Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*.

Questions to Consider

1. Just how much “British tyranny” did the colonies experience before the Boston Tea Party?
2. What made the Boston Tea Party so different from earlier forms of colonial protest that it led the British to react with such ferocity?

1773 Liberty! The Boston Tea Party

Lecture 7—Transcript

Welcome back. Today we turn our attention to the era of the American Revolution. Let's begin by looking at a familiar incident. On March 5, 1770, British soldiers opened fire on a crowd of men in Boston, killing five. News of the "Boston Massacre" soon spread throughout the colony and sparked outrage. But, as it turned out, this first bloodshed in the patriot cause did not bring on the Revolution. Actually far from it. Tempers cooled relatively quickly, and the colonies for the next three years remained relatively quiet, until 1773, that is, when the Boston Tea Party took place.

Well, before we delve into examining how the Boston Tea Party constituted a turning point in American history, let's lay out our objectives for this lecture. First, we'll look at the status of the colonies early 1760s and their relationship with England. Next, we'll examine the tumultuous 1760s when the colonists began to resist efforts by the British to tax and regulate them. Then we'll explore the Boston Tea Party of 1773. Finally, we'll look at the aftermath of the Tea Party and how it put the colonies on the fast track toward Revolution.

To understand the centrality of the Boston Tea Party in the story of the American Revolution, we need to start in 1763, that's the end of the Seven Years' War between England and France. (Americans knew it as the French and Indian War). For the British this was a global conflict. And when it ended, the government treasury was essentially empty and British citizens in London were rioting, primarily over wartime taxes.

So what to do? If you're the young King George III and his advisors, the answer seemed obvious. They needed to get tax revenue from the colonies. And they could justify this on several levels. One major issue was that they had thrown the French out of North America during that war and the least the colonists could do was pay for some of that. But in order to do this, to levy a tax on the colonies, they would have to end the longstanding policy that historians call "Salutary Neglect." This was a long period of about 80 years. They let the colonies essentially run their own affairs and basically ignore British colonial laws and trade regulations. Of course, when the British

government in the 1760s decided to reassert its authority over the colonies, Americans cried foul. And this triggered the beginning of a series of events that eventually, not right away, but eventually led to Revolution.

But before we go any further, let's clarify a few points. Because the American Revolution happened so long ago, and we know how it turned out, we often remember the American Revolution as an oversimplified story, a story that suggests some kind of inevitability. Now, you may recall, that one of my favorite themes in history is that nothing is inevitable. History is the product of choices that are made by people. Every moment in history presents many options. There's no predetermined script. There's no invisible "force" called inevitability. Things only seem inevitable after they've happened. This is especially true when we think about the events that led us to the American Revolution. Because we know the Revolution is eventually going to start and that the Americans are eventually going to win, it's very tempting to see these events of the 1760s and 1770s as pointing inexorably toward Revolution. But that's not necessarily the case. So we need to keep two things in mind: First, the American colonists between 1763 and 1775 are not fighting for independence. Far from it. These people saw themselves as Englishmen, and what they demanded from the Crown and the Parliament was respect their rights. They wanted to be respected as British citizens. In other words, they didn't want independence. They wanted a fair deal. They wanted fair treatment. It's only in 1775 to 1776 that the idea of independence really begins to take hold.

Think about this. Tom Paine's pamphlet, *Common Sense*, wasn't published until January of 1776. Paine knows at that moment that most Americans are still resisting the idea of independence. So he wrote his pamphlet to make the case—Wake up Americans! The events of the past decade all point to one thing. According to Paine it was common sense that America would break free from Mother Country. And as he put it, "Everything that is right or reasonable pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, 'tis time to part." Another one of Paine's famous lines, "It is absurd that an island would ever rule a continent."

A second theme we need to think about is that we need to take a step back from the highly charged rhetoric about "British tyranny" during the 1760s

and 1770s to examine the actual record. In other words, what did the British do? And another question, was it really all that outrageous? When we do this we'll see that the British government actually exerted great restraint when dealing with these rowdy colonists, that is, until the Tea Party. At that point, they let the hammer down. And very quickly thereafter, the first shots were fired at Lexington and Concord.

So with these two points in mind, first, that most Americans not seeking independence before 1775 and that, secondly, that British tyranny was actually pretty mild, let's now turn our attention to the events that lead up to 1773, and get us to the point that we can answer that question, why the Tea Party constitutes a major turning point in American history.

Well, as we noted, in 1763 the British government ended its policy of Salutary Neglect and began to tighten its control, or at least tried to tighten its control over the colonies. There's only one big problem. The Americans had grown very accustomed to operating their governments and their economies on their own, with almost no oversight or interference from London. And here is where the "Mother Country" metaphor is most helpful. If we think of Britain as the "Mother Country," it's really useful for us to also think of the colonies in 1763 as essentially an 18-year-old, who had grown up with almost no parental oversight at all. How would a typical 18-year-old react if suddenly his parents had a change of heart and decided that he needed a curfew, that he needed to bring up his grades, that there were certain friends he could no longer hang out with, and that he needed to pay room and board. That might not go over so well, right? Well, you get the idea.

For American colonies, this new reality began in 1763. Starting with the Proclamation of 1763, and it elicited anger. The Proclamation was the first of a series of pieces of legislation passed by Parliament. We won't go through all of them. We just want to hit the important ones. The Proclamation barred colonial settlement beyond the Appalachian Mountains. And this elicited great anger from among the colonies, because when they looked over those mountains, they saw opportunity. So any ban on settlement over there meant that they and their children might not have access to that land and the possibility of acquiring wealth and so forth.

The next year, Parliament passed the Sugar Act, and this also angered the colonists. It didn't anger them because it posed a new tax on sugar and molasses. It actually lowered the current tax on sugar and molasses. What angered the colonists was that it was apparent from the British wording of the law that they intend to collect this tax, which they hadn't done before.

The really big one in this early period is in 1765 was the first real burst of colonial outrage. And this occurs after the passage of the Stamp Act. The Stamp Act was a sweeping consumption tax on all kinds of things: newspapers, legal documents, insurance policies, pamphlets, licenses, and even dice and playing cards. And it's called the Stamp Act because to prove that tax was paid on an item it has to receive the official stamp.

Parliament hoped that this would raise £100,000 of revenue annually. Instead, it produced a mountain of controversy and not a shilling in revenue. This was the first direct tax on the colonies, and so it elicited a tremendous amount of hostility, and the first cries of "no taxation without representation." By the summer of 1765, secret organizations that eventually take the name the "Sons of Liberty" had organized resistance to the Stamp Act. They organized protests, burning of government officials in effigy, intimidated stamp collectors, and by the end of that summer and into the fall of 1765, all of the stamp agents who were specially hired to carry out the stamp tax, had resigned their commission, basically out of fear. At the same time, merchants in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, signed "non-importation" agreements, what we would call today boycotts of British goods. They refused to import or buy them until the Stamp Act was repealed. Then in addition to all this, representatives from nine of the 13 colonies met in New York City in October of '65 to hold the Stamp Act Congress. It was there that they drew up resolutions calling for the Stamp Act's repeal.

One year later, in 1776, Parliament does in fact repeal the hated Stamp Act—but, that very same day, passed the Declaratory Act to make it clear who was in charge. Parliament has no intention of letting the colonists—remember those unruly 18-year-olds—feel as though they can veto any legislation they don't like. So to clarify this, they passed the Declaratory Act, and it asserted the authority of Parliament to make laws affecting the colonies "in all cases whatsoever."

The next year in 1767, Parliament used this authority to pass the Townshend Acts. This again is another series of taxes, this one on glass, paint, paper, and tea, anything of this sort that was imported into the colonies. Again the colonists objected. They argued that this was taxation without representation. They formed another boycott effort. By this time officials in England are getting a little bit irritated by the way these colonists are acting, and so they begin to crack down more on smuggling. And they also begin to move more troops from the frontier where they had been on sort of frontier duty into seaport cities. And it's this policy that puts all those troops in Boston and other cities. It increased great tension between locals and English troops and led to many confrontations, the worst of which was the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770, when five colonists were killed.

Now let's pause to consider this summary of key events from 1763 to 1770. Because we know, given the vantage point where we are in history, the Revolution in 1770 was only 5 years away. It's very tempting to see these events as building inexorably toward that end. Very tempting to see the colonies on some sort of "road to Revolution." But the truth is, even with bloodshed in Boston, few colonists demanded Independence. Indeed, after a few months of protest and outrage, very little happened.

The colonists at this point are not hurtling down some "road to Revolution." Instead, the events of 1763 to 1770 fall into a very predictable pattern. Parliament passes a new law; the colonists protest, and then over time the matter eventually fades away. Then Parliament passes another law, colonial protest erupts once again, then again the issue sort of dissipates eventually. Again think about the Mother Country metaphor. This looks and sounds a lot like the ongoing typical battles between a parent and a teenager. Think about it. With the exception of five men killed in Boston, the British government acted with extreme leniency. It arrested no leaders in all this protesting. It barred none of these leaders from holding public office. It outlawed no organizations like the Sons of Liberty. It didn't close any newspapers. It didn't seize any printing presses, which is usually the first thing a repressive government does. It dissolved no colonial assemblies. It condemned no illegal conventions, like the Stamp Act Congress. In other words, "British tyranny" was pretty mild and hardly the stuff to induce Revolution.

So what happened next? The shortest answer is that in 1773, Parliament passed the Tea Act. To properly understand the Tea Act, we need to provide a little background here. The primary motivation behind the Tea Act was to save a huge corporation, the British East India Company, from bankruptcy. British officials feared that if this company went under it would ruin two things: It would ruin the whole British economy, pull it down into a great depression, and lose them, the British officials, a lot of money, because many of them were highly invested in this company. So they had what they thought was an ingenious plan: East India Company needed cash, and it had 17 million pounds of tea in its warehouses. The Tea Act did the following. It granted the East India Company a monopoly on selling tea in the colonies. And it would carry out this monopoly by hiring specially appointed agents in all of the colonies to handle the importation and sale of the tea. As it turned out, most of these people turned out to be the sons governors and very highly connected people, which added to the colonial anger. The third element of it was but a small tax on this tea. Even with this tax the East India Company tea would be cheaper than tea from smugglers, and that's where most colonists got it. So the British government, with this three-part plan, was very confident the colonists would accept the tax in exchange for cheap tea. If this happened, the plan essentially would be a win, win, win. The Americans would get cheap tea. The East India Company would get desperately needed income. The British government would get tax revenue, and also they would have affirmed their right to tax the colonies when they want to. Everybody wins! But the colonists, by this time, they had become conditioned to expect the worst when it came to laws on trade and taxes coming from Parliament. And behind it they saw a scheme to establish taxation without representation and special economic monopolies. I mean if the British East India Company can get a monopoly on tea, what's next? What other part of the colony might get parceled out to special interests in Britain at the expense of the colonial economic well-being?

Well, what happened next? It was only one year earlier that Samuel Adams, who's one of the primary agitators in Boston, had told a friend who was depressed about the humdrum state of the patriot cause, "*Nil desperandum* [which is Latin for 'never despair']. That is the motto for you and me. ... And where there is a spark of patriotic fire, we will rekindle it." The Tea Act of 1773 gave Sam Adams and the patriots their chance. The colonies

learned of the Tea Act in the middle of the summer of 1773. (Remember it takes a long time to get information across the Atlantic Ocean.) And they immediately began to organize resistance.

In October of that year, seven ships full of East India Company tea began to cross the Atlantic. When the first ships arrived in New York and Philadelphia, the Sons of Liberty were there, and they prevented the ships from landing and being unloaded. And they eventually forced those ships to turn right around, without unloading, and head right back to England with their cargo. Charleston, South Carolina, which was one of the other destinations, the Sons of Liberty allowed the tea to be unloaded but kept in under lock and key in a warehouse. It was in Boston that things got sticky. The Massachusetts governor, a man named Thomas Hutchinson, was a hardliner, and he announced that under no uncertain terms would the Sons of Liberty would be running the show in his colony. These ships full of tea would land, tea would be unloaded, and then it would be sold, according to law. Here is where we see the end of that familiar pattern of Parliament passing a law, the colonists protesting, then things calming down; parliament passing a new law, colonists protesting, then things calming down. Here's where we can actually start to say that America put its first foot on the road to Revolution.

In Boston, the Sons of Liberty, led by John Hancock and Samuel Adams, began to organize opposition to the tea. They held protest meetings almost every day. Finally, on November 28, the first ship, the *Dartmouth*, arrived in the harbor. The very next morning on November 29th the Sons of Liberty had posted handbills all across the city that read, "Friends! Brethren! Countrymen! That worst of plagues, the detested tea, shipped for this port by the East India Company, is now arrived in the harbor." The Sons of Liberty held a huge rally that morning, led by Sam Adams and all the others, and at that meeting they resolved that the tea must be returned without unloading. And the Sons of Liberty posted 25 men on the pier where the ship was docked to make sure the governor and no other officials had a chance to unload it. Soon enough, two more tea ships arrived, and now the standoff grew increasingly tense. More protests followed, demanding that the tea be returned, and the governor, equally determined not to let the tea leave the harbor. At some point, while pursuing these traditional forms of

protest of denouncing, of holding meetings, and so forth, a core of radicals within the Sons of Liberty secretly decided that the time had come for more radical action.

These radical Sons of Liberty hatched a plan to destroy the tea. On December 16, 1773, at the largest protest rally to date, the crowd gathered there heard the owner of the ship *Dartmouth* say that he had just spoken with Governor Hutchinson, and the governor had again refused to allow him to remove his ship without the tea unloaded. The crowd grew very, very angry, and Samuel Adams stands up and says, “This meeting can do nothing more to save the country.” And just a few seconds later, dozens of men dressed up like Native Americans burst into the meeting. And these men would come to be known as “Mohawks” thereafter. And this causes all kinds of tumult, mostly shouts and hurrahs of support, calls to bring down the government, denouncing the tea, and so forth. And the meeting at this point begins to break up. And it’s at that point that John Hancock said, “Let every man do what is right in his own eyes.”

Some time later that evening the Mohawks, these men dressed as Native Americans, and dozens of others who had simply blackened their faces—about 120 men—converged on Griffin’s Wharf. This is where the tea ships were held: the *Eleanor*, the *Beaver*, and the *Dartmouth*. Over the next three hours, these men go from ship to ship and break up all the chests of tea and dumped the tea in the harbor, 342 chests in total.

It should be noted at this point that no body at this moment in 1773 or for decades thereafter will refer to this as the “Boston Tea Party.” That name is actually first used 60 years later in 1834. If you just think about it, Boston is where five men were killed and they told everybody it was a massacre. If they had to come up with a name for this event, it would hardly have been Tea Party. That would have seemed quite silly. Most people would have just referred to it as the great destruction of the tea. In the aftermath of the Tea Party, key agitators of the Sons of Liberty, like Samuel Adams—(tactfully, as least as far as we can tell, did involve himself with the destruction of the tea) defended the Mohawks and the men who destroyed the tea as true patriots and defenders of liberty.

Across the Atlantic, however, the British government reacted with absolute fury. Even the moderates in Parliament, these are the men who normally, every time the colonists got up in arms, they urged restraint. This time they called for a crackdown. They essentially said they could accept angry speeches, petitions, a government official burned in effigy now and again, and even a little violence or intimidation against Stamp Act officials, but the destruction of tea, £10,000 sterling worth of tea, which is \$1,000,000 in today's money—was just simply too much.

Lord North, who was prime minister at the time, noted, spoke to King George III about this. And asked him to think back over what had transpired over the last ten years in formulating what to do about this incident. Let's listen to what Lord North had to say to the king,

The Americans have tarred and feathered your subjects, plundered your merchants, burnt your ships, denied all obedience to your laws and authority; yet so clement and so long forbearing has our conduct been that it is incumbent on us now to take a different course. Whatever may be the consequence, we must risk something; if we do not all is over.

In other words, punishing Massachusetts might trigger more colonial unrest, but doing nothing would undermine the authority of the government and lead eventually to a break between the colonies and the Mother Country. King George III agreed with Lord North, and he said, "The die is now cast. The colonies must either submit or triumph." The result was that Parliament passed a series of laws early 1774 that colonists immediately dubbed, the "Intolerable Acts" or the "Coercive Acts." The most hated of them was the Boston Port Act, a draconian law that shut down Boston harbor until the colony paid the East India Company for the cost of the tea that they destroyed. This effectively shuts down the economy of the colony of Massachusetts. A second one of these "Intolerable Acts" radically reorganized the Massachusetts government, and it placed most Massachusetts key officials under direct control of the Crown. A third law empowered the governor to quarter British soldiers in taverns or vacant houses.

While the people of Massachusetts refused to pay the cost of the tea, and they denounced these changes to their government. The Sons of Liberty whipped up support in other colonies. Samuel Adams and others sent out letters and messages to try to stir up support for Massachusetts in a time of need. In one of Sam Adam's circular letters he wrote succinctly—he asked the other colonists—“whether you consider Boston now as suffering in the common cause.” And increasingly they did. The colony of Virginia ordered a day of fasting for June 1, 1774. That was the day that the Boston Port Act took effect. Also in Virginia, a man named Thomas Jefferson, a relatively unknown man at the time, wrote a pamphlet entitled, “The Summary View of the Rights of British America.” And this pamphlet turned out to be one of the widely read pamphlets of the day. In it, Jefferson offered a very sharp critique of George III, and it pointed rejection of the British government's claim to authority to pass laws and impose taxes on the colonies. Jefferson wrote, “The God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time.”

Soon events began to move in unprecedented directions. In September 1774 delegates from 12 of the 13 colonies met in Philadelphia, to form the First Continental Congress. The body did a number of things: It denounced the Coercive Acts; it called for the creation of a colony-wide government to protect the colonies from further threats to their liberties; and they established another colony-wide boycott. This is pretty radical stuff. George III agreed that this was pretty radical stuff. And when he heard of this thing called the Continental Congress, and he heard they passed these kinds of resolutions, he reacted very angrily: “The New England governments are in a state of rebellion... [and] blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this country or independent.”

Accordingly, the Crown instructed officials in Massachusetts to snuff out the rebellion there. They had already sent a huge increase in troops, 4,000 troops over the previous few months. By this time, citizens of Massachusetts had formed essentially an illegal government called the Provincial Congress, and they did this to coordinate resistance to British officials, and this coordination also included military resistance, essentially military preparedness. And they urged towns to create militias, and drill them, and to stockpile guns and ammunition. This is were we get the figure, the “Minutemen,” regular

citizens who pledged to be ready at a minute's notice of an impending clash between the British troops and citizens of the colony of Massachusetts.

Well, let's speed the clock forward to the spring 1775. Gen. Thomas Gage (he is at this point recently arrived), and he is now commander of British forces in North America, and he's the governor of Massachusetts. His intelligence reports indicate to him that there's a stockpile of guns and ammunition at a little town called Concord, just outside of Boston. So on April 19, 1775, he dispatched a force of British soldiers to head out and destroy this cache of arms. Well, we all know what happened next. Paul Revere and many others sound alarm to wake the Minutemen to get them to take up arms. And when the British troops arrived just short of Concord, at a town called Lexington, they are confronted by 70 minutemen. After an altercation, the British opened fire killing eight minutemen. Then they moved on to Concord, where they find a small cache of arms and they destroyed it. And at that point they thought their job was done. But they had to get back to Boston. And all the way back to Boston, lying in wait were 100s of militia men and angry citizens, who fired at the Red Coats all the way back to Boston. The British suffered 273 casualties, including 73 killed; the colonists—88 casualties, including 49 deaths. No one knew it at the time, but they'd just fired the first shots of the American Revolution. A little over one year later Congress would issue the Declaration of Independence, the topic of our next lecture.

So how did we get here? The key event—the turning point—in the coming of the American Revolution was the Boston Tea Party. Up to that point the British government had exerted great restraint. But the destruction of the tea—all that private property—triggered a harsh response. And this harsh response led the colonists to form a Continental Congress formed. And then this action led the Crown to order greater military force. At that point, just 16 months after the dumping of tea in the Boston Harbor, the war was on. Well, that does it for the Boston Tea Party.

In our next lecture, we'll tackle one of the great Turning Points in all of American history—arguably in modern world history—the drafting and signing of the Declaration of Independence.

1776 We're Outta Here—Declaring Independence

Lecture 8

The Declaration of Independence accomplished two things: It set forth a detailed catalog of abuses by the British government that justified the Revolution, but its more enduring accomplishment was its assertion of a broad set of universal rights and liberties. These ideals would shape and animate the course of American history and would also inspire generations of freedom seekers around the world.

What led the 13 British colonies to make a radical decision to declare independence from England? In January 1776, independence was still a fringe idea. Then Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*, attacking the very idea of monarchy. Both its style, aimed at the common man and woman, and its timing, when even moderates were starting to doubt King George III's good will, made it a smash success.

By that summer, events were moving quickly. On May 15, 1776, John Adams proposed to the Continental Congress that colonies call themselves states and start writing their own constitutions. On June 7, 1776 Richard Henry Lee proposed the resolution “that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown.” Congress spent two days deliberating this resolution; the real issue was not whether to declare independence but when.

Next, the Committee of Five—John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Robert R. Livingston, and Roger Sherman—met to work out the basic framework of a declaration of independence, then left Jefferson to produce the first draft, which he did between June 11 and 12. Jefferson showed the draft to Adams and Franklin, who made a few stylistic changes, giving a more Enlightenment, secular cast to the language. The revised draft was presented to the Congress on June 28. Lee's original resolution was then declared on July 2—the real independence day. Between July 2 and 4, the Congress debated and revised the Declaration, then issued it on July 4. The colonists were free; now all they had to do was win the war.

So what did the Declaration declare? The final document consists of two parts: a brief opening statement of natural rights and a lengthy list of grievances against king and Parliament—the real business of the document. Today, we revere the first part, but in 1776, the second was considered much more important. Its form was in step with an English tradition, a bill of indictment listing a train of abuses; it created a common narrative from the experiences of all 13 colonies; and it shattered the fiction that George III was a good guy at the mercy of a wicked Parliament.

Natural rights are, simply, natural—not the gift of a king but “unalienable,” as immutable as the laws of physics.

The main assertions of the first section are that natural rights are, simply, natural—not the gift of a king but “unalienable,” as immutable as the laws of physics. It also asserted the right to overthrow oppressive government, an idea derived from John

Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government*. But whereas Locke asserted the right to life, liberty, and property, Jefferson considered “property” too narrow and materialistic an ideal and replaced it with “the pursuit of happiness.” He also wrote that these three rights were “among” the natural rights of humankind—they are not the only rights. This has enabled the document to speak to the ages, something Jefferson surely never expected.

In 1776, few people considered the Declaration a great document. So when did Americans come to revere it? In the 1790s, Republicans began quoting it in anti-Federalist speeches. By the 1820s, Jefferson had realized that the Declaration was the centerpiece of his legacy. He arranged for his tombstone to read “Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, and father of the University of Virginia.”

The Declaration’s meaning and significance expanded further when the women’s rights activists at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 issued their Declaration of Sentiments, which said, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal.” From Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address to Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech and

many in between, the wording of the Declaration became the centerpiece of civil rights rhetoric in America and beyond. But more broadly, the ideals of the right to overthrow oppressors and universal natural rights have spread throughout the world. ■

Suggested Reading

Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence*.

Ferling, *Almost A Miracle*.

Maier, *American Scripture*.

Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did the Americans bother with writing a declaration? Why did they deem it so essential?
2. How did the Declaration of Independence eventually emerge as a sacred document long after 1776?

1776 We're Outta Here—Declaring Independence

Lecture 8—Transcript

Welcome back. Today, we advance the calendar of American history only a few months from our last lecture on the Boston Tea Party. Today we'll examine the Declaration of Independence.

Let's start with what might seem like a ridiculously simple question. What famous document begins with the following words: "All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Hmm—pretty simple right? Declaration of Independence, 1776, Thomas Jefferson, and all that. Nope. Actually, it's a trick question. The key word was "begin." Let's look at how the American Declaration of Independence starts:

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them.

That sounds familiar too I bet. So what's the answer to my quiz? The answer is the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence. That's right. It was issued by Ho Chi Minh on Sept 2, 1945, declaring Vietnam's independence from France. Remarkable, no? Especially in light of our later involvement in Vietnam. But it also speaks volumes to the global significance of the Declaration of Independence. It's not merely a turning point in American history. It's arguably a turning point in modern world history.

But before we go into the details of how this remarkable document came to be, let's establish our objectives for this lecture today. We'll focus on four main things: First, we'll look at the situation in the colonies in early 1776 to see how they made the radical decision to declare independence. Next, we'll examine how the Declaration took form as a document, how it was written. Then we'll explore how the Declaration went from initially being considered not such a big deal by the Founders to becoming the central document of

American history. Finally, we'll examine the ways in which the Declaration has become a document of global significance.

Let's begin by assessing the situation in the colonies in early 1776. We want to answer the question: What led the colonists to make the radical decision to declare independence from England? Let's start in January 1776. That's the month that Tom Paine published his famous pamphlet, *Common Sense*. We mentioned this fact briefly in our previous lecture. Now let's take a closer look. Remember, independence is still fringe idea. Most Americans in January 1776 are still clinging to the hope, hoping against hope, that the colonies and the Mother Country will find a way to reconcile and work their differences out. Then, in January 1776, came *Common Sense*. It sold 120,000 copies—which is well beyond bestseller status in that time—and it did so in just a few months. And most estimates, by most people who study these kinds of things, say that at least 10 people probably read each copy. So it basically reached every adult in the colonies.

In this remarkable document, written by Tom Paine, that triggered a dramatic shift in public opinion. Why? What is in this document that makes independence common sense? First, Paine attacked George III. He tried to shatter the myth that was very popular at the time that George III was actually a good king who was simply the victim of a corrupt advisors and a corrupt Parliament. Tom Paine said, Wake up a minute. This an illusion: George III *is* the problem. In fact, Tom Paine attacked the very idea of monarchy. It was totally absurd and out of step with the times. Second, Tom Paine had a profound impact because of his style, the way he wrote the pamphlet. He aimed his prose at everyday people. Remember he wrote that an island cannot rule a continent. He wrote with a very simple kind of language. Most pamphlets in this era were written for and by intellectuals and trained in the law.

Thirdly, Tom Paine benefited from exceptional timing. By January of 1776 it had become harder and harder for moderates in America to maintain the idea that King George was a good guy who would save them from a corrupt and grasping Parliament. By January 1776 it was pretty clear to the colonists that George III had set out to crush them, economically and militarily.

Well, by the spring of 1776, the colonists, with these ideas swirling around in their heads, begin to take the first steps toward independence. The first notable moment came on May 15, 1776, when John Adams, who was a key figure in pushing for independence, proposed to the Continental Congress that the colonies start calling themselves states and start writing state constitutions. The Continental Congress immediately approves this radical idea, and the states begin this process.

Then came the dramatic moment, the proposal of Richard Henry Lee of Virginia on June 7, 1776. Lee proposed that the Congress formally adopt a resolution declaring the independence of the colonies from Great Britain. Let's take a listen to how it sounds. The resolution read as follows:

That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.

Pretty straight forward.

The Continental Congress responded by forming itself into a Committee of the Whole, where they opened the floor for debate, and they spent the two days, two full days, deliberating Lee's resolution. By the end of those two days, a consensus, in fact, emerged that most people agreed in the Congress that, yes, independence is inevitable, but they were concerned about the timing, when to actually make the announcement official. Some people in Congress said we need to do it immediately. You know the clock is ticking. And they believed this would allow the Congress to immediately start seeking alliances with other countries. Others, the majority actually, argued that they needed to wait. There were many reasons, but one in particular was that the delegates to the Congress had not been empowered by their state governments to vote for independence. In fact some of them had been told, Do not vote for independence if the question came up. So these men had to get back to their state governments and get instructions about what to do with this question on the table. So the Continental Congress decided to wait a few weeks, let these guys go home, and get instructions and come back.

But in meantime, it created a Committee of Five to draft a formal declaration of independence.

So, now let's turn to the process by which the Declaration of Independence took form as a document. The Committee of Five had five members. You know most of them: John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Livingston (from New York), and Roger Sherman (from Connecticut). Now immediately when they met the question was who is going to write the document. Who's going to take the first crack at it? Initially, Benjamin Franklin was offered the job. He was widely considered one of the great prose stylists of the day, one of the great writers of America. But Benjamin Franklin declined the offer, saying later that he didn't want to write a document that would then be dissected and torn apart by a committee. He was perfectly happy tearing apart someone else's work though.

The next choice was Thomas Jefferson. Why Jefferson? A couple of good reasons. One, he was a well-known writer. Not as well known as Benjamin Franklin, but still very well known. You might remember from an earlier lecture that he wrote a very important pamphlet in the wake of the Coercive Acts entitled, "A Summary View of the Rights of British America," one of the most popular pamphlets before *Common Sense*. Jefferson, in the intervening years, had done a lot of writing for the Continental Congress. So his peers knew he was a good writer. A second reason to choose Jefferson was that he was a Virginian—and it's important. Virginia was one of the most important states, and it's therefore important to have their people involved in these different decisions. And thirdly, and this is kind of an interesting fact—it's not like there's a long line in the Continental Congress lining up to get this honor. Nobody wanted to do it. They did not consider it an important assignment. At the time they didn't have any sense that this was going to be a momentous document, and that the person who wrote it would be therefore famous for having done so.

So, what happened next? The Committee of Five met only once, and over a couple of hours worked out a basic framework, and more or less what it should say, what points it should hit on. Then they left Jefferson to his own devices. Jefferson went to his room at Market and 7th Street in Philadelphia.

And from June 11–12, 1776, he wrote the first draft of the Declaration of Independence.

We should take a moment here to remind ourselves of a few things about Thomas Jefferson. For one thing, he was born in 1743 in Albemarle County, Virginia. He was the son of a prosperous planter from whom he inherited 5,000 acres of land. Jefferson attended the College of William and Mary and studied law. He was highly educated. He was also deeply involved in politics. He later served in the Virginia House of Burgesses, and he was also a member of the Continental Congress. Jefferson was also really tall—6-foot, 4 [inches]—so he was also one of the tallest around at that time. And he was strikingly handsome. But he kind of oddly for this imposing physical presence, he was also shy and a terrible public speaker. His real talent lay in writing. So this is one of the reasons he’s chosen to write the Declaration. When he sits down to write it, he’s only 33 years old. This is always a good reminder to ourselves just how young the Founding Fathers were.

OK. Let’s get back to the drama. On June 12, Jefferson finished his first draft and then sought out Adams and Franklin for some editing advice, give him a little stylistic help. And they made a important stylistic changes. The most important one came from Benjamin Franklin. Thomas Jefferson’s original wording was as follows: “We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable.” And Benjamin Franklin wanted it to sound a little bit less religious so he said let’s try, “We hold these truths to be self-evident.” Franklin wanted it to sound less religious, more in step with the secular ideals of the Enlightenment.

On June 28, 1776, the Committee of Five presented this document, the Declaration of Independence to the Continental Congress. And you’ve probably all seen the famous painting by John Trumbull. It’s actually in the U.S. Capitol rotunda building. You may have seen it before. You probably have seen it in a book anyway. But it depicts this grand scene of the presentation of the Declaration of Independence to the Congress. Many people often mistake this painting for the signing ceremony that must have happened on July 4, 1776. It’s actually not. It’s the presentation, which took place on June 28th. So what happened? Congress now has the document in their hands but nothing happens because first the Continental Congress needed to decide if it planned to declare independence. On July

1 and July 2, 1776, the Continental Congress debated Richard Henry Lee's resolution "That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States."

Finally, on July 2, the measure passed, the real Independence Day. We often see stories written by the Fourth of July, a famous letter by John Adams in which he's quoted as talking about this moment, which he predicts that generations of Americans to come would consider Independence Day "the most memorable Epocha in the History of America." Let's listen to a little bit more of what he has to say on this: As predicted that they will celebrate it as the "Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shows, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more." Pretty stirring language, and Adams is right on in his prediction and in his hopes, but of course he's writing about July 2! So when people quote him, they usually don't mention the fact that it's July 2. They want you to think it's actually July 4.

OK. So what happened next? Now that the Congress has announced independence, now they moved to explain their actions, which means they need to debate and discuss this independence that they have. So on July 2, that same day that they approved Richard Henry Lee's resolution, they created themselves into a Committee of the Whole and spent the next three days, July 2 to July 4, discussing and editing the Declaration. In the end they changed about 25 percent of the original document. Thomas Jefferson was there. He sat in silence while all this went on, not because he liked to be quiet, but secretly inside he was horrified by the changes that they were making. He later said he thought they "mangled" his perfect document. In any case, finally, on July 4, Congress approved the Declaration. There was actually no signing of the document that day. The first order of business, Congress sent the document off to a printer so it could then be distributed to the rest of the colonies. Most of the signing of the Declaration actually took place in early August. Some people weren't even around for a long time. It took a long time to get there. They signed it well into the fall. Copies were rapidly distributed to the states. In many places there were public readings of the Declaration followed by bonfires, ringing of bells, and firing of guns in

celebration. But they declared their independence. Now they had to win their Independence. That's the subject of our next lecture.

Right now, let's stay focused on the Declaration itself. What did the Declaration say? What did it declare? The Declaration of Independence had two parts. First the prosaic opening section, "We hold these truths ..." and then the list of grievances, the business section. Here's a key point to keep in mind when you think of the history of this document. Americans in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries revere the first section, and they completely ignore the second. The men and women of the Founding generation cared mostly about second section and very little about the first part, all that wonderful stuff about inalienable rights. What's important about the second?

The second section took up about two-thirds of the document. And it includes more than two dozen complaints directed specifically against George III. Let's listen to a some examples of these:

He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures. He has made judges dependent on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries. He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance. He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies without the consent of our legislatures. He has affected to render the military independent of and superior to the civil power. He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people. He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.

You can see they're pulling no punches here. And that's only some of the grievances on that they listed. George III was clearly the villain. Aiming

at George III—this is really important here. This set of grievances has a couple of important things we need to point out. First, it was part of a long English tradition. In English political history, when you were mad at the government, you drew up a “Bill of Indictment,” as it was called, and listed all the things that you thought were injustices, what they would call “a long train of abuses.” This underscored and validated the claims of the people who claimed to be abused. Just listen to how the Declaration phrased it, how they set up their train of injustices, their Bill of Indictment: “The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.” So that’s the sentence that sets up the list of “He has ... He has ... He has.”

The second important part about this business section in the Declaration is that it creates a common narrative. The 13 colonies had experiences British tyranny and abuses since 1763 in different forms and in different times. The Declaration pulls them all together, all the problems that we had with Great Britain over the years, into a common narrative that in effect we said that we have all, all 13 colonies, all the people of these states, experienced these things together. Thirdly, the grievance section of the Declaration shattered the fiction that George III was a good guy simply surrounded by bad guys. It makes clear, *he* is the bad guy. Notice how all those section begin with “He has ... He has ... He has.” It clearly means that the monarchy is no more. We’re done with it.

The people of New York provide us with a wonderful example about how this idea of the monarchy being over, this severing of the bond between king and people. They gave this idea concrete form by their actions. On July 9, 1776, a large crowd gathered in New York to hear a public reading of the Declaration. When they were done, the crowd headed down Broadway, just about a mile, down to the tip of Manhattan Island, where there was a small park. And in the middle of that park, there was a statue of George III. The crowd put ropes on the statue and then pulled it down, and then broke the statue into pieces. And if we are to believe the rest of the story, they took those pieces and melted them into bullets, which were then fired back at the

king's troops for the rest of the war. Wonderful symbolism there of literally tearing down the monarchy.

OK. Let's look at one final aspect of the grievance section of the Declaration of Independence, an interesting one, kind of an interesting footnote. The Continental Congress deleted Jefferson's original lines blaming slavery and the slave trade on George III. Interesting question! First of all, why did Jefferson put those lines in? He owned a couple hundred slaves. And why did the Congress decide to delete those statements against slavery and the slave trade? Historians have offered many possible reasons. It was perhaps Jefferson's little tilt toward emancipation? But the probable reason, at least for the deleting of this section, was that among the member of the Continental Congress, there was a general reluctance to ever mention slavery by name. It was just too touchy an issue.

So, now that we've explained what the Founders thought was most important—the grievance section—let's turn to Part 1, the part we consider most important. First, let's listen to those most memorable 55 words:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, 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. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

Why do we find this so significant? First, it's an assertion of natural rights. "These truths" are "self-evident." They come from the "Creator." They are not a gift from a king. They are "unalienable." They are not malleable; they're almost like laws of physics. Second, it asserts the right to overthrow oppressive government. This comes from Locke's Second Treatise on Government. Now do you see why Ho Chi Minh and other revolutionaries revered the Declaration?

Third, it includes the memorable triplet "life liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Why not "property" (Locke)? Well, we know where the idea of using "happiness" came from—George Mason used "life, liberty, property,

and the right to pursue happiness” in his draft of the Virginia constitution. Jefferson simply “borrowed” it. But in making his famous triplet: “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” Jefferson created a magnificently vague ideal. Property was too narrow, too materialistic “happiness” on the other hand was endlessly broad. Note further—Jefferson wrote “that among these rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” among. There are more! This is Jefferson’s genius, a document for the ages, even though he didn’t expect it.

Here we turn to perhaps the most intriguing and less well known aspect of the Declaration story, how the document went from initially being considered no big deal by the Founders to becoming the central document of American history. No big deal? That’s right. Few at the time considered the Declaration a great document. On July 4 Americans celebrated the act of declaring, Not the document.

So when did Americans come to revere the Declaration? In the 1790s as we’ll see in a subsequent lecture. The 1790s was dominated by Federalists (Adams, Hamilton, etc.). They downplayed the Declaration embarrassed by anti-British tone and alarmed by the similarity of language with Revolutionary France’s “Rights of Man.” But the emerging opposition of Jeffersonian Republicans came to see themselves as Defending the Spirit of 1776 and the Revolution against Federalists who were pro-monarchy and pro-British. Republicans began reading the Declaration on July 4th, quoting it in speeches, celebrating its author, Jefferson. They emphasized the Declaration as anti-monarchy/pro-liberty and rights. So when the Republicans came to power in 1800, they saw to it that the Declaration became firmly enshrined as the great founding document.

By 1820s Jefferson himself came to realize that the Declaration was the centerpiece of his legacy. So when he arranged for the inscription on his tombstone, he decided it would read: “Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, Author of the Declaration of Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom and the Father of the University of Virginia.” Then, just in case anyone doubted the importance of the Declaration, Jefferson and Adams, two key players in writing the document, died on its 50th anniversary, July 4,

1826. As I said you cannot make this up. But at the time people believed that this was evidence that God was smiling upon the Republican experiment.

But the story kept going. Over time the meaning and significance of the Declaration continued to expand. Women's rights activists, for example, met in Seneca Falls on 1848 where they drew up a document, the "Declaration of Sentiments," which said, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights." They take the exact opening that everybody knows and they insert "women." It also included a grievance section, in which all paragraphs begin the same way: He has ... He has ... He has. ... Of course they're not taking on George III. They're taking on men who have kept them at subordinate status. This was a brilliant tactic because they know the Declaration so well and by now it was taken as a sacred document. This will get people's attention.

Abolitionists see this too. They appealed to the Bible and the Declaration to make their case against slavery. William Lloyd Garrison said, "As long as there remains a single copy of the Declaration of Independence, or of the New Testament, in our land, I will not despair."

The labor movement also turned to the Declaration of Independence too. The Workingmen's Party in 1876 wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal, that they are endowed with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the full benefit of their labor." The document went on to denounce the abuses of capitalism, in which all the lines begin the same way: It has ... It has ... It has.

Abraham Lincoln played a key role in this in 1863 when he gave his Gettysburg Address. On Nov 19, 1863, he began this famous address with the following words. We know them well. "Four score and seven years ago." When is that? That's 1776, and he goes on, "our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

Martin Luther King did the same thing in his speech in 1963, a hundred years later, his "I Have A Dream" speech. He said,

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." ... 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.

Well, the list goes on and on. Movements for gay rights, environmental protection, gun rights, you name it. They all invoke the rights guaranteed in the Declaration. In fact, opponents of these movements also invoked the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson basically planted the idea that we all have rights—but left it up to us, and our sometimes messy democratic process, to figure them out.

OK. Now with the time we have left, let's explore briefly the ways in which the Declaration has become a document of global significance. We've already noted this by signing the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence from 1945. And there are lots of other examples. Just to give you a couple of them: Flanders Declaration of Independence 1790, Liberia's Declaration of Independence 1847, and Czechoslovakia Declaration of Independence 1918 all use the Declaration of Independence format.

But, more broadly, there's the enormous influence worldwide of the Declaration's ideals of the right to revolution and the notion that there are universal, natural rights. Today we call them "human rights." Let's leave the final word on this topic to the great historian of the American Revolution, a man named Gordon Wood. He wrote, "The Declaration of Independence set forth a philosophy of human rights that could be applied ... to peoples everywhere. It was essential in giving the American Revolution a universal appeal."

Well, for our next lecture we'll examine another key turning point related to the American Revolution—the pivotal Battle of Saratoga. Until then.

1777 Game Changer—The Battle of Saratoga

Lecture 9

On paper, the colonists did not stand a chance in the American Revolution—a handful of volunteers against the largest transoceanic military operation in history. George Washington and his officers preferred to fight a defensive war, but in the autumn of 1777, an irresistible opportunity arose to rout the British army at the Hudson River and prevent them from cutting New England off from the rest of the colonies. Not only did the Battle of Saratoga thwart a key British strategy, it also convinced France to support the colonial cause.

On July 6, 1777, British commander John Burgoyne won a decisive victory over the Americans at Fort Ticonderoga in upstate New York. The British had more than 50,000 soldiers in the colonies, along with hundreds of naval vessels, versus the Americans' 25,000 poorly equipped and barely trained volunteers and no navy to speak of. It seemed only a matter of time before the American Revolution would be put down, its leaders executed, and order in the colonies restored.

The Battle of Ticonderoga was only the latest in a series of defeats for the Continental army in the year following the Declaration of Independence—Long Island, Harlem Heights, Lake Champlain, White Plains, Fort Washington, and Fort Lee—with only two Continental victories worth noting—Trenton and Princeton. Thomas Paine famously called this state of affairs “the times that try men’s souls.”

The British were employing a strategy that they expected would win them the war by autumn. Major General John Burgoyne would lead an invading army from Canada into Vermont and on into upper New York, while General William Howe would lead his forces from New York City, up the Hudson River, to rendezvous with Burgoyne. Once united, the two armies would seize Albany, cutting the troublesome New England colonies off from the rest—dividing to conquer.

There were actually two Battles of Saratoga. The first (also called the Battle of Freeman's Farm) on September 19, 1777, lasted four hours and ended in a draw. Technically, the British won because they held the field at the end of the day. But the Continentals had checked Burgoyne's advance on Albany.

The key Continental figure in the battle was Major General Benedict Arnold, who rallied the patriots several times when they began to falter. Despite this exemplary service, the Continental leader, General Gates, relieved Arnold of his command, claiming he'd disobeyed orders in leading the attack. Both then and now, many believed Gates's motive was jealousy.

On October 7, Burgoyne took the offensive in the Second Battle of Saratoga (also known as the Battle of Bemis Heights). The British were outnumbered by at least two to one, but they were running low on food and supplies and needed a decisive victory. Instead, the battle was won for the Continentals in large measure by two men, a sharpshooter named Timothy Murphy and Benedict

Arnold. Murphy, under the command of Colonel Daniel Morgan, killed British general Simon Fraser. The British soldiers under his command became disorganized and soon retreated to two primary positions. Then, disregarding General Gates's orders to stay out of the battle, Arnold led an attack on one of the British strongholds. When his men were repulsed, he quickly led an attack on the second. They overran the British position in under an hour.

Burgoyne's army of 6,200 was now surrounded by a growing American force of at least 15,000. Out of time and out of supplies, Burgoyne surrendered. The upstart Americans had won the biggest victory of the war.



National Archives and Records Administration (148-GW-617)

Major General Benedict Arnold, a brilliant soldier, is only remembered today as a traitor.

The American defeat of Burgoyne’s forces proved the decisive turning point of the Revolutionary War for two reasons: First, the American representatives in Paris—Benjamin Franklin and John Adams—used the victory to convince France to give the Americans military and financial aid.

Saratoga convinced the revolutionaries themselves that they could defeat the British.

Second, and almost as important, the victory at Saratoga convinced the revolutionaries themselves that they could defeat the British.

Timothy Murphy remained in the Continental army for the duration of the war, service that included enduring the cruel winter at Valley Forge; pushing the British out of Philadelphia; frontier duty in upstate New York; enlistment in the famed Pennsylvania Line; and the Battle of Yorktown, where he witnessed the British surrender.

For a while, Benedict Arnold served the Continental army well. He was skilled and courageous on the battlefield, but he was also vain and hungry for glory. Increasingly frustrated with America’s military leadership, Arnold eventually decided to defect to the British. Most people today remember him as the most infamous traitor in American history. ■

Suggested Reading

Ferling, *Almost a Miracle*.

Furneaux, *Saratoga the Decisive Battle*.

Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*.

Questions to Consider

1. To what extent did luck play a role in the American victory at Saratoga?
2. Is it possible for one battle to change the course of a war?

1777 Game Changer—The Battle of Saratoga

Lecture 9—Transcript

Hey there. Good to see you again. Today, we only move the calendar forward, a little bit more than a year, from our last turning point, the Declaration of Independence. Let's pick up the story in early August 1777. That's when King George III received some excellent news—or so he thought. It had been a little more than a year since the rebellious and ungrateful Americans declared their independence from the Mother Country and the king, as you can imagine, was eager to put an end to this uprising as soon as possible. The good news that day suggested that end might soon be coming.

According to the dispatch in the king's hand, weeks earlier, on July 6, 1777, the British general, John Burgoyne, had won a decisive victory over the Americans at Fort Ticonderoga in upstate New York. And that was considered an impregnable fortress. It seemed only a matter of time before this so-called "American Revolution," at least in the king's mind, would be quickly put down, its leaders executed, and order restored to the empire. The Americans, thought George III, would regret the day that they had ever issued their foolish Declaration of Independence, a document in which they had the gall to accuse him of a long train of abuses!

But as it turned out, George III was getting a bit ahead of himself. The war was not over and soon the king and the British establishment were in for a surprise that would shock them to their very core. Well, before we go any further, let's take a moment to go over the objectives of this lecture. In the course of this lecture on the turning point of the American Revolution, we'll focus on four things. First, we'll look at the status of the Revolution in 1777. I'll give you a hint. It's not going very well for the Americans. Second, we'll examine the origins of the Battle of Saratoga, what led up to this epic moment in the history of the war. Third, we'll explore the actual Battle of Saratoga itself. The first thing to learn is that there are actually two Battles of Saratoga. Finally, we examine the impact of this Battle on the course of the war.

Let's begin by looking at the status of the Revolution in 1777. Well, I've already given you a hint. In the summer of 1777 things were not going well

for the American revolutionaries at all. To begin with, they were battling the world's foremost military power, the world's superpower, Great Britain. Just consider some of these numbers: By late summer of 1777, the British had more than 50,000 soldiers in the 13 colonies, or what they considered to be colonies, along with hundreds of ships. And it would get worse for the Americans. Over time, British troop levels would eventually top 80,000. So what did the Continentals have to match this? They had, at best, 25,000 poorly equipped and barely trained volunteers. Most of these men at this point carried their own weapons, and provided their own clothing and food and ammunition. At their peak, a couple years later, American troop levels would reach only 37,000—still less than half the British total of 80,000. What about the American navy? For all intents and purposes, there was no American navy at this point. This meant the British could effectively blockade the American coastline, paralyze the American economy, and cut off supplies, and limiting troop movements. So not only hurt the economy but also hurt the American war effort.

We can compare what appeared to be a gross military mismatch with a football game say between a reigning Super Bowl champion and a small high-school team. I mean that's essentially what we're talking about here when we compare Great Britain to the Continentals in 1777. It's a total mismatch. At least on paper.

And the news from the battlefields in that first full year of the war since the Declaration of Independence was issued reflected this great disparity in terms of military experience and preparedness. The results were not promising. The Continentals, up to 1777, had suffered a series of bad defeats. Probably the worst was one of the biggest in the early going of the war. In the summer of 1776, right about the time they were issuing the Declaration of Independence, a major battle was forming in New York, eventually called the Battle of Long Island. August 27–30, 1776. At this point, Washington had evacuated most of his army down to New York, as his new base, and the British are following him. And they will eventually bring in tens of thousands of troops, hundreds of ships, and engage in a big battle on Long Island, what is now today Brooklyn. And it doesn't go well for the Continentals. George Washington's troops are quickly rolled up by the British, and they're caught essentially. On a high bluff overlooking Manhattan, called Brooklyn Heights,

it really looks like the war is over. And for all intents and purposes it is. But Washington gets a little lucky, and under a moonless sky with maybe a little bit of fog, he sneaks his thousands of men across the East River on to Manhattan. The British wake up and ready to pounce on George Washington and his troops, and they're gone. And that allows George Washington to scurry out of Manhattan, and keep the war effort alive. Following this terrible defeat, the Battle of Lake Champlain is lost in October of 1776; the Battle of White Plains is also lost; the Continentals lose Fort Mifflin in New York and Fort Mifflin in New Jersey in November of 1776. And these are just some of the battles they're losing.

Many Americans, understandably, including key figures in Congress, including some who were ambitious to elevate themselves, began to raise doubts about George Washington's competency. Some called for his removal as head of the Army. And this is like any political situation, where people are scheming behind the scenes, some hoping that they or their friends would replace George Washington. Things were so bad by the late fall in 1776 that Tom Paine took out his pen again and wrote another pamphlet, this time one called *The Crisis*. Let's listen to what Paine wrote. You'll probably recognize these opening lines:

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.

Well Paine had a way with words. And his pamphlet, since he had published *Common Sense*, since it was a huge hit and was published and republished all over the colonies, so too with *The Crisis*. It's a real kind of rallying call to the patriot cause saying, These are dark times. Instead of give up, we need to really pull together.

Now, there was no doubt, as Paine pointed out, that the Continentals, the patriots, had a "hard conflict" before them, to use Paine's words. The Americans did get some good news at the very end of 1776 and into early

1777. On December 26, 1776, Washington crossed the Delaware and captured Trenton, New Jersey. And then a week later he won the Battle of Princeton on January 3. Now these were small skirmishes, probably not hugely militarily significant, but war is not just about who wins in the battlefield. It has a lot to do with how this news effects the populace and their popular support for their leaders during the military effort. So it was actually a pretty important set of victories to buck up the American spirit at this point. At that point, once these two victories took place, the British and the Americans went into winter quarters. So how do we get from here to the Battle of Saratoga?

It began in the spring of 1777, once everything had thawed out. The British launched a strategic military plan that they had been working on all winter, and they really thought they had this one perfectly diagrammed that would bring a smashing victory fully and essentially put the Revolution out. They fully expected would end the war in a matter of weeks, certainly by the end of the summer into the early fall. On paper, it was a brilliant plan. Military strategists today, hands down, say it was a brilliant plan—on paper. Of course there's a big difference between execution and diagramming something. Essentially, this plan called for Major Gen. John Burgoyne, who's a very experienced, highly accomplished individual, to lead an invading army into the Americas from Canada, of course entering from the north into Vermont and then down into New York. His primary objective was to seize the city of Albany, New York. That's one force—there's three parts to this.

A second British force, this time under commander Lt. Col. Barry St. Leger, would move east from Lake Ontario and across upstate New York to rendezvous with Burgoyne from Albany. So Burgoyne is coming from up high, up north down to Albany. And St. Leger is coming from the west moving east. And then there's a third force, an equally large force under the command of Gen. William Howe. He's the guy who just kicked George Washington out of New York and almost ended the war right then and there. His job was to leave New York City and head north up the Hudson River to rendezvous with Burgoyne and St. Leger. So these three armies together would seize the city of Albany.

If this plan succeeded, it would cut off the troublesome New England colonies from the rest of the colonies. And so with these troublesome New Englanders—many people in England and the British establishment really thought it was essentially a revolution hatched in Boston—and if they could get the New Englanders out of the picture, and Sam Adams and rest, that the Revolution would fizzle. They would just decapitate it leadership-wise, and that that would cause the Revolution to collapse. In a word, the British are basically pursuing here your classic divide and conquer strategy. Divide the colonies and they will win. The war ideally would be over by the end of the summer.

But the plan began to fall apart right from the start. The first big problem came when Gen. Howe took his army off in the wrong direction. That's right, the wrong direction. How is this possible for an experienced military man like this? Well, it had to do with a fundamental flaw in the British situation. There was no single person in charge of the this operation. So it was a kind of multi-headed monster. Gen. Howe was receiving conflicting orders as to where he should go. Should he follow Washington south down toward Philadelphia, or should he hook up with Gen. Burgoyne to the north? Well he wasn't what to do. His orders weren't clear (remember the days when it took six weeks or so to go across the Atlantic Ocean and several weeks to move 20 or 30 miles so he just decided on his own that his best bet was to follow Washington and so he headed not to the north to meet Burgoyne but rather to the south, to pursue Washington and take the city of Philadelphia. This blunder effectively doomed the New York campaign, not entirely, but is certainly puts it on the fast track to failure. Communication in those days was so slow, as we just mentioned, and spotty, that Burgoyne does not know this. If Burgoyne had known that Howe had taken off, that still would have been in a bad position. But he's actually going to act blindly, assuming once he gets down to Albany that at any moment Howe's large army is going to join him. He won't know that Howe's gone in the wrong direction until he's lost the campaign.

So Gen. Burgoyne is hundreds of miles away in upstate New York when he commences his invasion. At first, as we noted in our introduction, things went according to plan. And this might have actually played into Burgoyne's troubles down the road because things went so well he get a little over

confident, even cocky, that led him to take many of the big risks that he will take in just a couple of weeks. Burgoyne took his force of some 8,200 men down Lake Champlain, they actually moved down the water to help them move quickly, and on July 6, as mentioned in the introduction he seized Ft. Ticonderoga, a significant loss for the Continentals.

But then Burgoyne made a fateful decision. Flush with his recent victory, perhaps, as I said, over confident, he decided to cut loose from his supply lines and press on to Albany to deal with what he thought would be this major killing blow to the Continentals. Again, he did not know that Gen. Howe was trudging toward Philadelphia in the wrong direction. And there's another thing that he doesn't know, and that is that Lt. Col. St Leger's force that was supposed to meet him from the west to the east had been stymied at the Battle of Oriskany on August 6, 1777. St. Leger actually won that battle, but was so badly bloodied by it and disoriented that he ended up taking his force back to where they started, their camp at Ft. Oswego. Burgoyne did not know both, that Howe has gone the wrong direction and that his other supporting army has headed back in the wrong direction.

So he was on his own now, all alone in the wilderness of upstate New York, with fast-dwindling supplies. What Burgoyne also did not know (again, he's really operating in the dark) was that the nearby American forces under Gen. Horatio Gates were steadily growing in number as reinforcements arrived. Apparently that message had gotten out to the Americans. Don't just be a summer soldier, the sunshine patriot. Get out there and do your part. So Gates' army is actually growing. And Burgoyne is going to be facing a foe that is getting larger and more powerful, and more dug in to their position than when they started.

Then things got worse for Burgoyne. He needs supplies. So what does he do? He sends a fairly large force, about 1,000 men, many of them German-Hessians off on an expedition to acquire desperately needed supplies. And what do they need. They need the basics. They need horses, food for the soldiers as well as the horses. They need ammunition, which they can steal or requisition from locals. But instead they meet up with some Americans, under the command of Gen. John Stark, and they fight it out in what's known as the Battle of Bennington, August 16, 1777. Stark, by the way, was the

man who gave New Hampshire its slogan. If you've driven through New Hampshire, it's on the license plate and anything you can get your hands on: "Live Free or Die." He was a very inspirational kind of commander with his slogans. Stark defeats sent by Burgoyne. Burgoyne loses 600 men and he doesn't get any supplies. Now he's in a deeper fix.

Now, why are supplies so important here? It's really important to point this out. Pretty much anytime we're talking about the military in a war situation, people who study war and people who take a fascination with war often get kind of fascinated by the strategy. They want to see war-like chess, which to some degree it is. They love to talk about flanking maneuvers, amphibious landings, and brilliant feints and charges, and so forth. All of that stuff about war is legitimate and important. But people who are in the military will often tell you that's really the obsession of what people would call "armchair generals," people that study it more as a hobby than anything else. But real generals, generals in the field, trying to move an army over vast expanses of land and engage with the enemy, talk supplies, supplies, and supplies. An army is only as good as its supply line. Really, that's a maxim that good for thousands of years of history.

So for Burgoyne, what all this boils down to is that at this point he has no supplies, virtually no supplies, and he has to halt his army, stop his advance on Albany, to gather supplies. And this took him almost a month (they moved slowly in those days), from early August to early September. And the problem for him is that while he's gathering supplies and getting his act together, so too are the Americans.

Now, let's look at the actual Battle of Saratoga, and as I mentioned in the introduction, there were actually two Battles of Saratoga. In fact the whole campaign involves probably more than 10 battles that sort of fit together as part of this larger campaign. The road to the first Battle of Saratoga began on September 13, 1777, when Gen. Burgoyne led his army of about 8,000-plus across the Hudson River to its west bank. He intended to follow a road southward to Albany. Essentially, he was going for it. He was really rolling the dice here at this point. He's deep in enemy territory. He has no information on the whereabouts of St. Leger or Howe, the other two supporting armies.

Now Burgoyne knows he's going to get a fight. He knows there's an American army in the vicinity, but he doesn't have very good intelligence. And if you've ever been in upstate New York, even today, in the 21st century, the place we're talking about is thickly wooded, rolling hills and mountains. It's very difficult to see a few hundred yards in any direction. And so these British soldiers and scouts, they don't know this land very well. So they have very limited intelligence. They don't know how big the American army is that they are approaching. And they also don't know precisely they are.

Well, he eventually finds them. The Continental army is under the command of Gen. Horatio Gates, one of my favorite names of American Revolutionary generals, although he's not generally one of the most likeable sort of person. Anyway, General Gates had taken up a fortified position. He's had plenty of time to dig in on high elevation called Bemis Heights, a 300-foot-high outcropping up over the Hudson River. Military 101—high ground. It's always good. So the two armies finally clash close to this location in what becomes the first Battle of Saratoga on September 19, 1777.

So Burgoyne's taking the offensive as his force approaches a position just north of Bemis Heights called Freeman's Farm, and there he was met by a force commanded by Colonel Daniel Morgan. Now you may recognize that name. Daniel Morgan was, by the end of the war, a very famous commander in the American Revolutionary army, and his specialty was commanding men with long rifles—Morgan's rifles, as they were called. He was exceptionally skilled in the use of rifles, exceptionally skilled at long-range firing. And Morgan's a great commander. He's like John Stark. He's a great motivator. So he's sent out there to the front lines to sort of fend off this first push by Burgoyne. The two sides engaged very quickly and within an hour the British, under the command of a very capable officer, General Simon Fraser, remember that name, began to push Morgan's men back. Then the Americans, when they seem to be getting pushed back a little, were rallied by the sudden appearance of General Benedict Arnold. That's right, General Benedict Arnold. Now remember, this is the Benedict Arnold before he turned traitor. It's really important to remember this. A lot of hall of shamers in history often have parts of their lives that we should remember, and that are quite remarkable, that we tend to forget after they commit some grievous sin or error or what have you. Benedict Arnold falls into that category.

Up to the point that he turns traitor, and joins the British cause, General Arnold was one of the best commanders in the entire Continental Army. In fact, the reason he was in Saratoga was that George Washington sent him there knowing that he was a valuable guy, and this was going to be a crucial showdown with the British. He was, by all accounts, an incredibly brave man, completely unafraid of fire during engagements. He was inspiring. He inspired great devotion among his men. Let's listen to what one of his men when he was talking about General Arnold, the way he pulled his units together and got them to fight well: "He was our fighting general, and a bloody fellow he was. He didn't care for nothing; he'd ride right in. It was 'Come on, boys!'—it wasn't 'Go boys.' He was the bravest man as ever lived." And that's not just one man's opinion. Many people spoke of General Arnold as this remarkable figure—dashing, brave, almost in some ways kind of crazy out on the battlefield.

In this First Battle of Saratoga, Arnold rallied the patriots and kept them from faltering at that moment. And from that point the battle kind of saw-sawed back and forth for the next four hours, with the British gaining a little ground, and then losing it to the Americans and visa versa. The battle finally ended at the end of the day with the Americans retreating to a secure position. Now, for all intents and purposes, if were to score this we'd say it was a draw. Neither side drove the other from the field. But in the old traditional schools of war Burgoyne could claim a technical victory because his army had held the field to the end of the day.

The Continentals, though, had a lot to celebrate in terms of what really matters. First of all, they had checked Burgoyne's advance on Albany and stopped him cold in his tracks. Secondly they had inflicted heavy losses on his forces. On that first battle at Saratoga, Burgoyne lost 600 men, killed and wounded. The Americans lost less than half of that, 283. And these numbers matter. Not only lose twice as many, because the Americans have reinforcements arriving every day, and Burgoyne had none. Even though he thinks, any moment now, these two phantom armies are going to appear somehow and are going to save him.

Despite this exemplary service, in the wake of this first Battle of Saratoga, Benedict Arnold was relieved of his command by General Gates, who

claimed Arnold had violated orders that he was told not to join the battle. Many historians who have studied the battle and studied this friction between these two men have concluded that General Gates did this out of jealousy. General Gates was not a very likable guy. I mean he's a capable general but not a likable guy, kind of a sourpuss. And you can see why he'd be jealous, particularly if you think about those words we just heard from a soldier describing Arnold as the bravest man he that has ever lived. So Gates removed Arnold from command for having violated some orders.

The British and Continentals would clash again three weeks later, on October 7, in what was the Second Battle of Saratoga. Burgoyne again, because he has too, took the offensive. At this point, he was desperate. He was still 25 miles from Albany, which is a huge distance given the rough terrain, and the way they are traveling, which is essentially on foot. And by now, his force has dwindled down to about 6,000 and he was outnumbered by 2 to 1 by the Americans, and his forces outnumbered and they were running really low on food and supplies. So Burgoyne effectively decides to go for a decisive victory. It's kind of an all or nothing on his part.

General Gates was the official commander of the Continentals, as we know, but on the day of this battle he was far from the action. And this was his preferred. He was kind of old-school general, where he sort of stayed out of the way, and let his underlings do the fighting. So he was at least a mile away from this decisive battle. Instead the battle itself was essentially won by two men that day. I mean there were lots of important people, but two sort key persons we'll focus on. One was the aforementioned Benedict Arnold. Even though he'd been removed from command, he'll make an appearance. And secondly, an unknown Pennsylvania sharpshooter named Timothy Murphy. Timothy Murphy was a sharpshooter in Colonel Daniel Morgan's famous corps of riflemen. These marksmen sported long muskets, called long rifles. And they had rifled barrels, which if you knew much about gun technology, it means they're going to be much, much more accurate. So they had great long-range accuracy, about 100 yards, and they were deadly even beyond that. The British, their muskets were only considered accurate at about 50 yards. So they had a 2 to 1 advantage.

Morgan's men were sent to meet the advance force of Burgoyne's of 1,500 soldiers. Morgan ordered his men to take up positions in the woods to take advantage of the natural cover. This is becoming a traditional way of fighting for the Americans. Then Morgan noticed this very important British General Simon Fraser, a widely admired commander. All the Americans knew who this guy was, great skill and great reputation and he was riding about in the open doing what he should do, rallying his men. And of course he's got a bright uniform. He's got all kinds of decorations. He's clearly an important person.

So Morgan tells Murphy to get up in a tree and take a shot at this guy. Murphy climbs up the tree with his long rifle, puts the barrel between two branches and he gets a nice steady shot. Murphy then took careful aim and fired. His first shot hit Fraser's saddle strap so he's getting close. His second shot grazed the horse's mane. His third shot struck Fraser in the abdomen and he fell from his horse and was carried from the field. Fraser was no longer effective that day, and he died the following day. With this key loss, of their key commander at a crucial moment in the battle, the British soldiers under Fraser's command became disorganized and soon retreated to two primary positions.

It's at this point that Benedict Arnold, ordered by Gates to stay out of the battle, could not contain himself. He heard the firing in the distance, and he said, according to accounts, "No man shall keep me in my tent today!" he shouted. "If I am without command, I will fight in the ranks ... Come on! Victory or death!" It's very dramatic stuff. Maybe it's a little Hollywood, but it's also very in character to a large degree of what we know about Benedict Arnold. So disregarding Gates' orders, he led an attack on one of the two British strongholds the British had taken up. Arnold and his men were initially repulsed. Arnold didn't fall back and lick his wounds. He said on to the other British stronghold. And it turned out that one was more weakly defended, and his men were able to quickly overrun this position. In the process, Arnold suffered a terrible leg wound, but his men performed admirably, and they won the day.

At this point, General Burgoyne's army of over 6,200 men was now surrounded by a growing American force of at least 15,000 and counting of

Americans. All of his ways out are cut off. All the rivers and the mountain passes are effectively cut off. He's almost out of food and other vital supplies and winter was soon to set in. Remember this is October. Burgoyne thinks about making a dash, but he realizes there's no way for him to do it. He decides that he needs to surrender. He soon meets with General Gates and agrees to a total surrender. They lay down their arms and the battle is over.

And with that, the upstart Americans had won the biggest victory in the war. It turned out that George III had celebrated way too soon when he exulted at the news that Burgoyne had taken Fort Ticonderoga. Weeks later, when the king learned of Burgoyne's defeat and surrender, he reportedly "fell into agonies." You can imagine his despair.

There was still a lot of fighting left in the war. Remember this is just late 1777. But the American defeat of Burgoyne's force proved the decisive turning point of the Revolutionary War for two reasons. First, the victory at Saratoga convinced the revolutionaries that they could defeat the British. It did not matter what the match-up looked like "on paper." You know Super Bowl champs versus the little high school team. On paper, that matters; but in reality, it didn't. The underdog Americans could win. And the second most important impact of that battle was—and this is really the most important one, was that the victory at Saratoga convinced the French to form an alliance with the Americans.

Three weeks after Burgoyne's surrender, an American boarded a ship—because it took three weeks to get the news down to the right people—an American boarded a ship bound for France. He carried with him special news of the American victory and instructions to get to America's representative in Paris, Benjamin Franklin. He arrived in early December. Franklin knew he was coming so he met him very quickly. The first thing Franklin asked him, being a Philadelphian, was have they taken Philadelphia. When the messenger told him that they had, Franklin was stricken, literally, like he had been hit in the stomach, fearing the worst had happened to his favorite city. But then the man said hang in their. According to the account, he said, "But sir, I have greater news than that. General Burgoyne and his whole army are prisoners of war!" The effect on Franklin, according to the messenger, was "electrical." And I love that phrase because, of course, we associate Franklin

to electricity. Two days after Franklin received this news, he passed it on to French officials, the French government opened negotiations to form an alliance. On December 17, Franklin reported to America that the king of France, Louis XVI, “was determined to acknowledge our Independence and make a Treaty with us.” A formal alliance was soon agreed to, bringing to the American cause vital military and financial aid—which were, essential to the American victory. Really, by most accounts, we could not have done it without the French assistance.

The Americans, however, had very little time to savor this victory. It was a big deal, but they still had a lot of fighting to go, because despite the thwarting the master plan to divide and conquer the colonies, the war was far from over. There were many battles, many trials in the coming years that would test the will, test the meddle of the American war effort, but they would prevail.

Unfortunately, this win, this victory of the Revolution, would not be won with the assistance of Benedict Arnold. For while he was a skilled and courageous man on the battlefield, Arnold was also vain and hungry for glory. I think we got that from the quote I cited earlier. He was a real swashbuckling type. And he grew increasingly frustrated after Saratoga, with what he saw as thick-headed and ungrateful military leadership, the kind of leadership that you saw in General Gates. Eventually, Arnold decided that he wasn’t getting the credit that he deserved, and he defected to the British. Many people today remember Benedict Arnold as the most infamous traitor in American history, and he is, but they don’t remember that he was also the hero of Saratoga, the turning point battle of the American Revolution. In fact, if you visit the Saratoga Battlefield in upstate New York, you will find no monument to General Arnold, although there is a statue of a man’s leg, which was placed there to commemorate Arnold’s sacrifice in the battle, but there’s no marker, no mention of his name at all.

This fact might explain an interesting curiosity, why so few Americans know much about the Battle of Saratoga and its significance in American history. Another reason why so few people know too much about the Battle of Saratoga is that General Washington was not there. Most Americans see George Washington as inseparable from the story of the Revolution. Well,

hopefully by now you can get past the fact that Washington was not there, and that Benedict Arnold was there, and that Arnold played a key role in the victory, to see that the Battle of Saratoga was a vital turning point in American history.

OK, I think we're about out of time. In our next lecture, we will look to an incident that threatened to unravel the achievement of American Independence—Shays's Rebellion.

Thank you.

1786 Toward a Constitution—Shays’s Rebellion

Lecture 10

When Daniel Shays led an uprising of farmers in western Massachusetts in 1786, his aim was modest: to stop foreclosure proceedings against distressed farmers. Yet to many Americans, the rebellion proved that the first American government under the Articles of Confederation was too weak to meet the needs of the new nation. In response, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and a group of like-minded men organized the Constitutional Convention.

Daniel Shays first entered the public eye as a soldier in the Continental army during the American Revolution. He fought at the battles of Bunker Hill, Ticonderoga, Saratoga, and Stony Point. By the end of the war, he had reached the rank of captain; in peacetime, he was elected to a series of local offices, including town warden, and remained active in the local militia. Had it not been for the severe postwar economic depression, Shays might have lived out his days as no more than a respected citizen.

The Articles of Confederation, established in the last years of the Revolution, created a weak central government for the new American states, reflecting the founders’ fear of centralized power. It had no president or national judiciary and a weak congress with no power to tax or to regulate interstate commerce.

The depressed economy of the 1780s hit all Americans hard, but most severely affected were farmers, who faced plummeting crop prices, mounting tax bills, and a scarcity of hard money to pay them. Massachusetts, in particular, was refusing to accept tax payments in the paper money that most war veterans were paid with. Farmers in western Massachusetts soon found state courts foreclosing on their homes and farms.

The farmers petitioned the state government to cease foreclosures, lower taxes, and issue paper money that could be used to pay taxes. When the government refused in mid-1786, enraged farmers took matters into their own hands. Calling themselves the Regulators, bands of 500–2,000 farmers

armed with muskets and clubs shut down circuit court sessions. The first incident took place on August 29, 1786, at the Court of Common Pleas in Northampton. Word spread quickly, and other groups disrupted proceedings at courts in nearby towns.

Note that these were nonviolent events; no shots were fired and no one was hurt. Also note that Shays and his fellow farmers did not consider themselves rebels—far from it. They believed they represented the interests of the average American citizen against the elite merchants and politicians who threatened not only them but the young republic itself.

On September 26–27, Shays and his men prevented the sitting of the state's supreme court, then reiterated their demands in another petition. The Massachusetts government ignored it, so they disrupted the supreme court again on December 26.

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Shays and other leaders planned a raid on the state arsenal at Springfield that held 7,000 muskets and 1,300 pounds of gunpowder. But a letter outlining the plan was intercepted by a militia officer. Shays arrived in Springfield at the head of 1,500 men on January 25, 1787. Waiting

for them was a better-armed force of 1,200 men under General William Shepard. Shepard fired into Shays's ranks. Four men were killed, and the rest fled.

Shays retreated toward his hometown, Pelham, but met a force of 4,400 led by Revolutionary war hero General Benjamin Lincoln. Shays offered to lay down arms if his men were granted a general amnesty. Lincoln refused and routed Shays's men a second and final time. Shays went into hiding, was tried in absentia, and was sentenced to death. But the state government, now led by Governor John Hancock, was eager to put the matter to rest. In June 1788, Shays and the others received a pardon.

Shays and his followers did not succeed in their immediate aim. The real impact of Shays's Rebellion was to ring the death knell of the Articles of Confederation. Henry Knox, a Federalist and proponent of a strong central government, presented an alarmist report of Shays's Rebellion to the Continental Congress and George Washington. Knox, along with Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, used the incident to promote fear of mob rule and to sway several states into sending delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Within two years, the young nation would have the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. ■

Suggested Reading

Beeman, *Plain, Honest Men*.

Richards, *Shays's Rebellion*.

Stewart, *The Summer of 1787*.

Waldman, *Founding Faith*.

Questions to Consider

1. Were Daniel Shays and his fellow farmer rebels justified in their actions? Did their movement constitute a defense of the Spirit of '76 or threat to it?
2. Can it be said that Madison, Hamilton, and other Federalists seized on Shays's Rebellion as an excuse to call a Constitutional Convention to radically reshape the form of the federal government?

1786 Toward a Constitution—Shays’s Rebellion

Lecture 10—Transcript

Welcome back. It’s time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Let’s begin our lecture today by looking at a critical moment in the life of the young American republic. On March 15, 1783, General George Washington headed north to a place called Newburgh, New York, where much of the Continental Army was in winter quarters. The war had ended, the fighting, back in October (for all intents and purposes) in 1781 in Yorktown. But when Washington found out where his officers were, and they were angry. They had not received pay for many, many months. They were suffering with poor provisions. And they really felt disrespect by the country, by the Congress for being treated in this manner. And their anger had risen to such a level that one of them, a guy named Major General John Armstrong, five days earlier, had issued an address in which he said, Look, let’s not plead with Congress anymore for our pay and for our food. Let’s take matters into our own hands. If need be, let’s cast off Washington’s leadership and let’s even consider taking up arms to get what we deserve. This was known as the Newburgh Conspiracy.

And Washington was horrified when he heard of it. He rightly feared a civil war was in the making. But on the other hand he was also very sympathetic to the plight of these men. He was caught between the two. Washington calls a meeting, heads up to Newburgh, and it’s a very, very tense moment when he meets and addresses the officers. Let’s listen to what he says when he meets them in this large room, in which some are standing, some are sitting, in their tattered outfits:

Let me entreat you, gentlemen, on your part, not to take any measures, which, viewed in the calm light of reason, will lessen the dignity & sully the glory you have hitherto maintained. Let me request you to rely on the plighted faith of your country, and place a full confidence in the purity of the intentions of Congress. . . . By thus determining—& thus acting, you will pursue the plain & direct road to the attainment of your wishes. You will defeat the insidious designs of our enemies, who are compelled to resort from open force to secret artifice. You will give one more distinguished proof

of unexampled patriotism & patient virtue, rising superior to the pressure of the most complicated sufferings.

Washington, in saying these words, basically telling them, don't do anything rash. You've been extraordinary. You've saved and created American independence. Don't throw it away now because you're angry. Just wait. Just have faith in Congress. People are working on it. It's all going to work out. Because of his extraordinary leadership and his reputation, the Newburgh Conspiracy fizzled. This was a critical moment, though, for America, one that really revealed how weak the central government was. And it reminds us again how unique America was in avoiding a civil war. Most revolutions, as we know, are followed by civil war.

Well, that's the key theme for today's lecture: the problem of this government, known as the Articles of Confederation. But before we plunge into the tumultuous 1780s, let's establish some objectives for this lecture. We're going to focus on four things. First, we'll look at the state of the union in the mid-1780s, in particular, we'll look at the serious flaws in those Articles of Confederation. Secondly, we'll examine the situation in Massachusetts that gave rise to a farmer's uprising eventually called Shays's Rebellion. Thirdly, we'll look at Shays's Rebellion itself. What exactly it was and how it played out. And then fourthly, we'll examine how the shock that followed Shays's Rebellion spurred a movement to reform the Articles of Confederation, a movement that eventually produced an entirely new government under a federal constitution.

OK. Let's begin by looking at the state of the union in the mid-1780s. One word to describe it is "crisis." But before we go any farther, we should remind ourselves that the central problem is that the Articles of Confederation are a very weak form of government. We need to remind ourselves that this is exactly what Americans wanted. In the 1770s and 1780s, Americans were fearful of centralized power. This is why they broke away from Great Britain. And in their minds, when they declared independence back in 1776, independence did not mean they created a new nation. It meant they created essentially 13 sovereign states. The Articles of Confederation was technically a constitution, but not really a constitution. It's an alliance. In the words of the Articles, themselves, "a firm league of friendship." It's a treaty essentially

among 13 sovereign states. Here's the wording of it in the document itself: "Each state retains its sovereignty, freedom, and independence, and every power, jurisdiction, and right, which is not by this Confederation expressly delegated to the United States, in Congress assembled."

In a word, the Articles of Confederation were excellent in theory, according to Republican theory, you know, decentralized power, but in practice it was disastrous. And there were basically three main flaws with these Articles. First of all, the Congress that it created had no power to raise any kind of money, any kind of revenue. They did not have the power to tax. And it didn't have the power to compel states to pay their share for the government. It only allowed Congress "request" states to pay their fair share. As a result, the government basically was almost always out of money.

A second flaw with these Articles of Confederation is that it required unanimous approval of any amendment that would change them. So if you wanted to fix these Articles of Confederation, you had to get all 13 states to agree to the change you are making. In effect one or two states, no matter what their size, could kill any legislation. And there was one great example of this. In 1782 the government needed money so they proposed a 5 percent tariff on imported goods. Out of 13 of the states, 12 of them agreed that this was a good idea. But Rhode Island decided that this would be the beginning of tyranny, the beginning of the end of Republican government so Rhode Island measure blocked it, and with one little state blocking it, the measure went nowhere.

A third problem with the Articles of Confederation was that it created no strong chief executive, which meant that it had no effective leadership, no one person to give it some direction or give it some spirit. In some ways it's really remarkable that this government was able to win the Revolution and that they were able to find some way to pay for it. I mean basically what it did in order to pay for it was they issued tons of paper money, which eventually became worthless, and the same thing by issuing lots of bonds, eventually getting some loans, vital loans from France and from Holland. But they were unable to raise money in a more effective or efficient manner.

Well, the Peace Treaty, that ended the war, was finally signed in September of 1783. And in the next few weeks, the next few months, the Army demobilized. Washington said farewell to his troops, said farewell to his officers. As far as he was concerned, he was going to fulfill that important dimension of the *Legend of Cincinnati's* that he bought as a great citizen soldier, and now he was going back into retirement to enjoy his final days on his plantation.

But soon the flaws become very apparent that were in this government that had just won independence. In 1784–86 Congress barely functioned. It had almost no money in its treasury, and it had no way to raise any money. It had very little authority to do anything so Congress would go for months without even meeting. And there were real problems facing this government. Conflicts were breaking out between states. Just to give you one example, Virginia and Maryland began to argue over navigation rights of the Potomac. New York and Vermont nearly went to war over the fixing of their boundaries, and there were lots of other examples, including trade wars between states. Some states wanted tariffs on goods crossing state lines. This was a serious, serious problem. And it gets worse because the financial crisis facing the government was made worse because big-time loans from France and from Holland were coming due in 1785. And these weren't loans they could just slough off. They had to pay them, so they needed revenue.

So Congress revived this notion of the five percent tax that Rhode Island had killed a few years earlier, and again 12 states line up and say, "This sounds like a good idea. Let's do it." And this New York killed the measure, kind of exposing the flaws in this system, the unanimous vote required, so the federal government basically could do nothing. To make matters even worse, the entire country was facing a really poor economy, likely due to the fallout from the war and the fact that America now had to create all kinds of new trade relations. And the economy was essentially in recession. Most Americans were severely hard-hit by this, but most severely were farmers. They faced falling prices, mounting taxes, and scarcity of hard money way out there in the frontier to pay those taxes and to pay those bills. Many farmers were Revolutionary War veterans, and they had been paid for their service in Continental notes, or Continentals as they were known. And as we mentioned, Congress had printed so many of them that they had practically

no value. No one would accept them, and this is where we get the phrase, “not worth a Continental.”

In Massachusetts (where we’re going to focus today), the government of Massachusetts was dominated by a powerful cadre of eastern merchants. This was true in almost every state actually, but Massachusetts especially so. the government of Massachusetts required citizens to pay their taxes in hard money, not paper money, and certainly not those worthless Continentals. Farmers in western Massachusetts were very upset about this, and they had lots of Things they didn’t like about the government as well. One of them was that they wanted the capital moved. Most states put their capitol outside, away from the center of commerce, away from the ports. But Massachusetts kept their capitol in Boston. They wanted it moved in inland somewhere, somewhere where in the center of the state. They also wanted to abolish the upper chamber of the senate. They wanted a simplified court system. They wanted lower taxes. They wanted to pay these taxes in kind with goods or with paper money. In the ensuing and unfolding crisis, many of these farmers found themselves in state courts facing foreclosures on their homes and their farms, largely because they could not pay their debts, and they could not pay their taxes. They simply didn’t have the money; they didn’t have currency.

By summer of 1786, they had reached the breaking point. Massachusetts state legislature, again dominated by merchants, had ignored their requests for changes, and this led them to form formal protest organizations, essentially a formal protest movement. It started out by creating county meetings. All in the western part of the state would hold meetings where farmers and merchants would draw up grievances and then forward them to the state legislature. In some cases they not only went so far as to issue grievances but also to demand a new state constitution. And their sentiment, their anger, is really encapsulated in a speech by one of these farmers trying to explain what the source of his anger was and what kind of different deal they wanted. And like a lot of these farmers, he was not only a farmer, he was also a revolutionary war veteran. He said,

I have been greatly abused, have been obliged to do more than my part in the war [the Revolutionary War]; been loaded with class rates [by rates he means taxes], town rates, province rates, Continental

rates and all rates ... been pulled and hauled by sheriffs, constables and collectors, and had my cattle sold for less than they were worth. ... The great men are going to get all we have and I think it is time for us to rise and put a stop to it, and have no more courts, nor sheriffs, nor collectors nor lawyers.

That's a nice neat summary of what they're thinking is. They're angry at the government, and they are particularly angry at the courts, which they see as depriving them of their property.

So a huge meeting, the biggest meeting of all is called for in August of 1786, way out in Hampshire County in the western part of the state. And again they draw up a list of grievances and forward them to the eastern government. They also, unbeknownst to the eastern government, have plans to disrupt court proceedings, acts of civil disobedience. The first of these incidences took place on August 29, 1786, in the Court of Common Pleas in Northampton several hundred farmers (some of them armed, most of them not) showed up and they're determined to prevent foreclosure proceedings to take place, which they know are cases on the schedule to be heard that day. So they surround the courthouse and when the judges show up to begin proceedings they refuse to let them enter the building. The judges are very intimidated and they essentially suspend court proceedings until November.

Word of these acts of civil disobedience spreads. More of these groups emerge, calling themselves "Regulators," others just really angry citizens. In most cases they were not armed, but some of them bore arms. But at this point no shooting is taking place. And they begin to shut down court sessions. In one of these efforts in Worcester, Massachusetts, more in the center of the state about 40 miles west of Boston, in early September, they show up, close the court, and refuse to let the judges hear the sessions. At the point, the governor says, that's it. I've had enough. And he calls up the militia. And to his shock and horror, the militia refused to be called out. They actually refuse to show up. And this same thing happens in Concord, very close to Boston, about a week later. The men shut down the court, and then the militia's called out and the militia refuses to be called out. In three more towns, they shut down the courts. These alarming incidents draw the attention of the members of Congress, and they are alarmed by what they

see as a rising civil insurrection. Congress calls for an increase in army. The army was only about 700 soldiers. It was tiny. They called to triple the size to 2,000. And not surprising they call for most of the soldiers to be raised in New England. Very clear what they are trying to do, to put down this insurrection. As a reflection of the weakness of this government, they only raised about a hundred recruits instead of the hundreds that they needed. So that effort obviously fails.

One of their efforts does succeed. They sent Henry Knox, a key government official, up to Massachusetts and to start issuing reports back to them as to what exactly is going on. Back in Massachusetts more courts continued to be closed by protestors. It's important to focus on this. Up to the moment it is nonviolent. Some people did carry muskets and pick axes. But at this moment, it's still nonviolent. No shots were fired. No one is hurt. The protesting farmers did not think of themselves as rebels. They think of themselves really as just everyday citizens who are forming a protest movement in order to get their rights and get their voice heard. They believe they are oppressed by a small cadre of elite merchants and politicians in the eastern part of the state. And if they don't stand up for themselves, they will be in serious trouble. Let's listen to what one of these farmers had to say in sort of explaining his motivation for participating in these protests. He said, "I earnestly stepped forth in defense of this country [in 1776], and liberty is still the object I have in view."

The government of Massachusetts rejected this idea: Oh, right! Samuel Adams—you may remember him from the days of the Revolution—he was famous as one of the most radical agitators of the day. But now by the 1780s, he's a member of the establishment, and he is furious at what these protestors are up to. He calls for a hard-line crackdown and executions if need be of these rebels. He said in so many words, rebellion against a monarch was fine (that's what I did), but "the man who dares rebel against the laws of a republic ought to suffer death." So I guess Sam Adams became more reactionary in his old age.

The Massachusetts government doesn't quite go that far but they do offer a kind of combination of reforms, kind of the carrot and stick approach, if you will. The carrot of course is to offer some good things to the farmers

to make them back down. And these were some tax relief, and maybe pay their tax a little bit later, and also to pay some of those taxes in kind, with goods rather than with hard currency. So these are small improvements. But along with the carrot came the stick. Many people thought, more aptly, the hammer. This was the Riot Act. The Riot Act was a no holds-barred series of laws that set up for the cracking down on this rebellion that was taking place. It said any sheriff who killed a protestor trying to quell the rioting would not be guilty of murder. If that happened then that then that just happened. The law also suspended *habeas corpus*. It also said any rioters who were apprehended would forfeit their lands, would be given 39 lashes, and then spend a year in jail.

A second law, a second part of this package, was the Militia Act. It said any officer of the state militia who abandoned his duty, who failed to show up when the governor called him out, would face the death penalty. Most people in Massachusetts didn't focus on the carrot part. They thought that was just minor window dressing reforms. They focused on the stick, and they decreed that this was outrageous. Many of them began resurrecting the language used in the 1770s against the British. In fact one letter went so far as to say this is indeed a new version of British tyranny. So they began shutting down more courthouses. They denounced the governor in the east and the establishment with even greater force.

So in late December, the governor of Massachusetts, Governor James Bowdoin, comes to a determination that now this has moved into new territory. He announces in early January in 1787, that he's going to raise a private army of 4,400 men—it's going to be a huge army, much, much larger than the United States' army. This army will be paid for by 153 Boston merchants. He actually makes the first donation to it. And it's going to be headed up by General Benjamin Lincoln, who was a very well known Revolution general.

Well let's stop at this moment and ask a question here. Why would the governor of Massachusetts want to form a private army? It's very simple. By this point in January 1787, it is clear that the militia cannot be relied upon. The militia is simply not obey his commands to come out and put down the rebellion. So he forms this army relatively quickly, and gets a lot

of volunteers, mostly easterners who aren't affected by these problems. On January 19, under General Benjamin Lincoln, his army heads west out into the backcountry.

Well the people in the backcountry were enraged by this. I mean this is sort of textbook for what they were always told a tyrant would do. Right? A tyrant would seize power, oppress the people, and would create their own personal standing armies. More and more people begin to join the protest movement. More and more people sympathize with the protestor movement as this army of Lincoln begins to move westward. So at this point you really got to stop and ask yourself a question. This rebellion is called Shays's Rebellion. So who is Shays, and where is he at this point? Daniel Shays is the man we're talking about, and by now by January of 1787 he has emerged as a key leader of this movement. He wasn't initially. Massachusetts officials sort of latched onto his name as being the leader, as really the head of the movement—enemy number one. It's a bit of an exaggeration, although he was indeed a key leader.

Who is Daniel Shays? He was born in Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1747. Like most people in his generation, he grew up on a farm and then to own a farm. And when the Revolutionary War broke out, he joined the Continental Army, and fought in several key battles: the Battle of Bunker Hill, the Battle of Fort Ticonderoga, the Battle of Saratoga, and the Battle of Stony Point. And by the end of the war he had reached the rank of captain. For him, having started out at the entry level in the army was a pretty remarkable rise. At the end of the war, 36 year-old Shays does what all the other soldiers do. They return to their past life, in his case a farm in a place called Pelham, Massachusetts. Daniel Shays's experience in the army had given him a taste of leadership. So in those early post-war years he ran for and was elected to a number of public offices, including town warden and several others. He was a very highly respected individual. He also, like many other former Revolutionary War veterans, stayed active in local the militia. When the protests began, he joined the farmer protests because he was facing the same problems they were. He had a middling farm. He was not initially a key leader. But by early 1787 he is in fact the leader of basically three main rebel groups. One of them is led by a man named Eli Parsons in a place called Chicopee in western Massachusetts. A second group is led by Luke

Day in western Springfield. And Daniel Shays led another group in Palmer, Massachusetts. It was sort of the easternmost cluster of rebels. But again in the public eye in the east, Shays was understood to be the ringleader.

OK. Let's get back to the action. January 1787 Benjamin Lincoln is leading this large army to western Massachusetts, about 3,000 men. Daniel Shays and his fellow rebel leaders decide that the government has upped the ante so it's up to them as well. So they decide to raid a federal arsenal in the town of Springfield. And they know it's full of armaments and gun powder—7,000 muskets, as it turns out, and about 1,300 pounds of gun powder. They do this and they plan this because they believe they need the firearms. Lincoln's going to bring a formal army. They should turn from a rag-tag group of farmers, of whom some have muskets and some don't, to a real formal fighting force.

These three clusters of rebels decide to stage a three-pronged attack to seize the arsenal. But unfortunately for them they communication by letters and one of their letters was intercepted by a local militia officer who was not sympathetic with them. And he amassed a sizable force at the arsenal to hold it and protect it. On January 25, 1787, Daniel Shays and Palmer, the two leaders, arrive with about 1,500 men. Luke Day for other reasons not able to get there in time. And they found waiting for them—they thought they were going to find the Springfield arsenal completely unoccupied. It was actually occupied by 1,200 members of the militia under a man named General William Shepherd. Shepherd orders the cannon to be quickly brought up as Shays and his men are approaching, and orders that the cannon be fired over their heads. Shays and his men don't stop so he orders the cannon lowered and then firing into the crowd. And this action kills four of the rebels, and the rest simply scatter. Daniel Shays eventually regroups and gathers most of his men and retreats to his hometown in Pelham.

By that point Benjamin Lincoln's army has arrived and is looking for these clusters of rebels. Daniel Shays knows this so he knows he needs to keep moving. So on February 3 Daniels Shays moved his force 20 miles north to a town called Petersham. Benjamin Lincoln, with his scouts out in the field, learns of this and makes a nighttime march through a snow storm. (This is going to earn him all kinds of accolades after the event.) He arrives at this

location on February 4. And there he finds Daniel Shays and his men all camped out, completely unaware that they are about to be attacked. Lincoln springs his surprise attack on them, routs Shays's men. They scatter into the countryside. And at that moment the rebellion was pretty much over. Daniel Shays fled to Vermont. He has a £150 price on head. Sporadic resistance continues. But for the most part the rebellion was over. Most of the men just trickle away and head on home.

The Massachusetts government, now that the rebellion appears to be petering out, begins to make a deal, and they offer amnesty to anybody who will take a loyalty oath. Hundreds and eventually thousands of men of Massachusetts will indeed take this loyalty oath in order to gain amnesty. The leaders of the rebellion though would be subject to prosecution. Daniel Shays was tried in absentia and sentenced to death. Twenty other men were tried and sentenced to death. In the end only two were hanged. Governor Bowdoin was trounced in the next election. And a new governor, Governor John Hancock, was more sympathetic to these farmers and so he pardoned Daniel Shays and the all the other rebel leaders. Daniel Shays eventually returned to Massachusetts briefly but then moved to upstate New York, where he lived about 37 more years, and he died quietly, almost anonymously, in September of 1825.

So why is this event so important? These alarmist reports coming out of Massachusetts alarmed many leaders in Congress. It suggested to them that the Article of Confederation are too weak. And it convinced them of the need to form a new stronger central government. And they seized upon Shays's Rebellion to get Congress to call what was eventually called the Annapolis Convention. They met in Annapolis, Maryland in the fall of 1786. Twelve delegates from five states met, so it was not well attended. But the people that did show up were all dedicated to the idea of a strong central government. These included James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. And they sent a message to Congress suggesting that Congress ask the states to send delegates to Philadelphia in May of the following year, in 1787—ostensibly to modify the Articles of Confederation. Congress finally agreed and called this convention in February 1787, right as Shays's Rebellion is disintegrating. And they called for the meeting to be take place in May. Madison and Hamilton are planning to seize this moment. Even though the idea is they are going to reform the Articles of Confederation, they plan

to scrap them. Now this is not a conspiracy. It's not a coup. They are men of 1776, but they argue that this idea liberty was simply not enough. The Revolutionaries feared centralized power, and rightly so. But Madison and others had come to fear the opposite of centralized power which was weak and ineffective government. On the one hand, power does threaten liberty. But on the other hand that weakness does too. And the challenge before them was to create a new federal government with sufficient power but also with safeguards, things like checks and balances, that would guard against tyrannical power.

So on May 17, 1787, three and a half months after the end of Shays's Rebellion, the Philadelphia Convention opened. Over the next four months, six days a week sessions, these men gathered and worked on a new form of government. It was finished on September 17, 1787. And they created effectively a new government. And then it went on to ratification. That's another incredible story. But it happened by July 1788. Then another amazing story, the drafting and the sending out of the ratification of the Bill of Rights that took place by 1791.

And suddenly the United States had a new government. It was, in fact, a second revolution. The new Constitution was far from perfect. It left all kinds of questions unanswered, with slavery as one of them. But here's one way to measure the enormity of what Madison and company had just accomplished. The U.S. Constitution, by many measures, is the oldest written constitution in the world. By comparison, the nation of France, since the late 18th century, has had 17 constitutions.

Well I think you can agree that Shays's Rebellion and the Constitution Convention that it generated was one of the great turning points in early American history.

For our next lecture we'll take a look at another Revolution—only this one involves not war or conventions, but rather a revolution about technology and economics. It's known as the Industrial Revolution. Until then.

1789 Samuel Slater—The Industrial Revolution

Lecture 11

When Samuel Slater arrived in America in 1789, he brought with him little tangible wealth. But in his head he carried detailed plans for constructing a water-powered textile mill. Within a few short years, Slater had established the first commercially successful textile mill in Rhode Island. Many tried to replicate his success, most notably a young entrepreneur named Francis Cabot Lowell, putting America on the path to becoming the world's foremost industrial power.

In the late 18th century, before industrialization, American manufacturing was an artisanal process. Every craftsman began his career as an apprentice to a master. Every craftsman made a complete product out of a small shop, with his own tools, and according to his own schedule. In short, production of goods hadn't changed significantly since the European Middle Ages.

The first product to be industrialized in the West was cloth. In late 18th-century America, all spinning and weaving was done by hand, generally in the home and by women. Because this was a laborious process, clothing was often simple, rough, and drab.

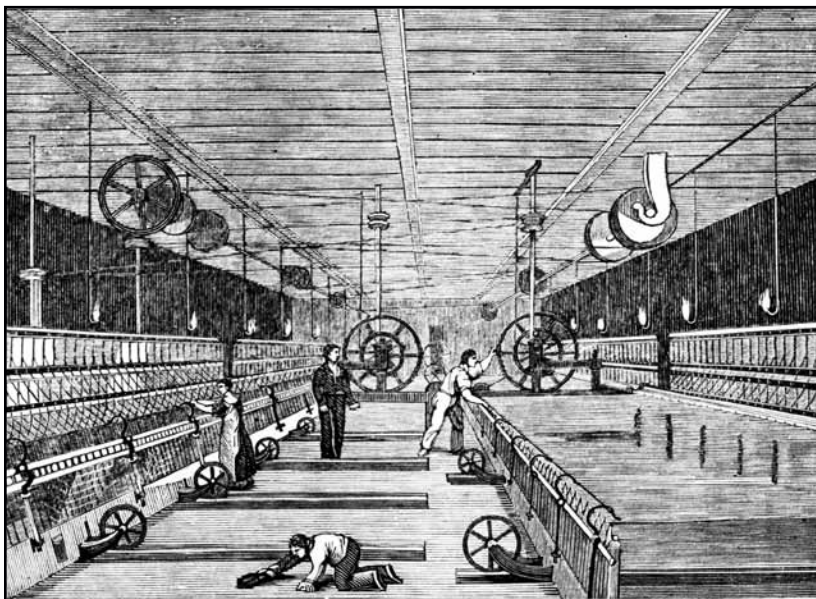
Samuel Slater grew up in Derbyshire, England, where he was apprenticed to Jedediah Strutt, a textile manufacturer and partner of Sir Richard Arkwright, the inventor of the spinning frame. Slater quickly showed he had a mind for mechanics. He was ambitious to start his own business, but the competition in England was too intense. In 1789, he decided to head for America, but there was one problem: Britain had banned the export of any industrial machinery or designs. In one of the earliest known acts of what we might call industrial espionage, Slater memorized the machine schematics and headed for New York.

Slater found the conditions of manufacturing in America shockingly primitive. He wrote to Moses Brown, a wealthy Rhode Island merchant interested in breaking into textiles; he outlined his credentials and offered

to build Brown a mill. The resulting mill was built in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The machines were tested on December 20, 1790, and found to work perfectly.

The firm of Almy, Brown, & Slater was soon producing too much cloth for the local market and hired agents to sell their product in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. They opened a new factory in 1793, then seven more throughout New England over the next several years. They hired entire families of weavers and established Sunday schools for the children. By the time Slater died in 1835, the cotton trade was processing 80 million pounds of cotton worth \$47 million annually.

Some of Slater's employees went on to found their own factories. The most famous of these was the Boston Manufacturing Company, established in 1814 in Waltham, Massachusetts by Francis Cabot Lowell. It boasted the first completely integrated manufacturing system in America and became



The machines Samuel Slater brought to the United States enabled a rate of cloth production without precedent in the colonies.

the prototype of the modern corporation: Lowell sold shares of stock and eventually built a factory town.

Americans thought they were on the verge of an ideal industrialization, avoiding the ills plaguing England's industries. Of course, this opinion required turning a blind eye to the agricultural aspects of cotton production and the evils of slavery.

The Industrial Revolution quickly spread from textiles to pretty much everything else. Note, however, that the revolution was not driven by any new technology or technologies but by new processes. Manufacturing broke with traditional artisan ways, subdivided the production process, trained apprentices as specialists in only one aspect of the craft, and began paying market wages instead of just wages. This was all in accordance with the new rules of business, which aimed at maximizing profit, competitive pricing, aggressively seeking new markets, and taking risks—in short, capitalism.

The broader impact of the Industrial Revolution was a shift in American values from republican simplicity to capitalist consumption, even in agriculture. It changed the role of women in society, separating the spheres of home and work for the first time. Public education was born out of the factory town and the need for trained labor. Industrialized printing of everything from books to sheet music changed the face of entertainment. The nation saw rapid urbanization as well; in 1815, America's population was 95 percent rural, and by 1920, it was more than 50 percent urban. We can even say the Industrial Revolution led to the invention of time—or at least our disciplined sense of it. ■

Suggested Reading

Peskin, *Manufacturing Revolution*.

Sellers, *The Market Revolution*.

White, *Memoir of Samuel Slater*.

Questions to Consider

1. Just how revolutionary was the Industrial Revolution? Does it really qualify as a revolution?
2. On balance, have the benefits of the Industrial Revolution outweighed the problems that came with it?

1789 Samuel Slater—The Industrial Revolution

Lecture 11—Transcript

Welcome back. It's time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Today we look at the story of a man that few Americans even remember anymore—Samuel Slater. He was the man who started the Industrial Revolution in America. But before we go any further, let me ask you a simple question: Was the Industrial Revolution really a revolution? I ask this because we so often overuse words like “Revolution” and “Crisis.” Does the Industrial Revolution qualify? Well, while you're thinking about this, I think it's good to have something to compare it to. One of the greatest revolutions in human history was the Agricultural Revolution. It took place about 10,000 years ago. In this revolution, nomadic people all around the world stop and begin to learn how to plant, and that led them to develop cities, mathematics, language, government, and religion, what we now call civilization—a pretty big revolution. So with that in mind by way of comparison, does the Industrial Revolution measure up?

For now, let's leave that question unanswered for now. Let's first turn to the story of Samuel Slater and the dawning of the Industrial Revolution. But before we do, let's establish our objectives for this lecture. We'll focus on four main topics. First, we'll look at the state of manufacturing in America in the late-18th century, before industrialization. Next, we'll examine how Samuel Slater started the first successful textile manufacturing establishment in America and in so doing unleashed the industrial revolution. Then we'll explore the ways in which the Industrial Revolution spread from textiles to pretty much everything else. Finally, we examine the broader impact of the Industrial Revolution—in other words how it influenced and reshaped virtually every aspect of American society.

So let's start by looking at the state of manufacturing in America in the late-18th century, before industrialization. In this era, everything was made by a man skilled in one of many artisanal trades: butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers, of course, but also brewers, carpenters, coopers, cordwainers, tailors, blacksmith, gold, silver, and pewter smiths, masons, weavers, potters, rope makers—I've run out of fingers. Many, many more.

These men were part of an artisanal system that had been around for hundreds of years, dating back to medieval Europe. At the top of this system was the master craftsman. He's a man who has fully developed his skills. He owns a small shop, usually connected right to his house, and he makes products for local consumption. The second group are apprentices. These are young boys. Usually they start out at about age 12. They are placed in the care of a master craftsman by their parents, where they expect their child will learn, I love this phrase, "the art and mystery of the craft." You may recall Benjamin Franklin started out this way. He was apprenticed to his older brother. He was a printer. And he hated both his brother and this apprenticeship arrangement, and that's why he ran away to New York, then Philadelphia. The next group of people in this hierarchy are journeymen. Journeymen are somewhere in the middle. They are skilled craftsmen, who at age 21 have a test. They've learned the arts and mysteries of the craft, and they take a test before a group of master craftsmen in whatever trade they're in. And if they pass the test, then they become official journeymen. And they can go from shop to shop and sell their skills and be paid a fairly decent wage. Over time, if they save their money and they've proven themselves, they may actually become master craftsmen themselves, open up their own shop. And of course they begin to take on apprentices, and to hire journeymen, and the system just keeps going, keeps going, keeps going.

These artisans were part of a decidedly pre-modern world. It was characterized by a number of things: craft production, you know they made everything in a skilled manner with their own tools. They're going to make also an entire product, an entire shoe or an entire loaf of bread. These men owned their own tools. They worked in their own shops, usually very small shops with not more than half-a-dozen people. They also enjoyed what we would call irregular work patterns. There's no clock. There's no whistle. There's no schedule here. It's very what you would call casual time. They started their day sometime after sunup, stopped sometime just before sundown. They worked at a leisurely pace. As long as the work got done, they might work really hard if they had an order to fill, then slow down. They also enjoyed "slack time," usually in the winter when supplies ran short or orders ran short. They just didn't do anything. And whenever the moment would be necessary, they'd take time off to go have a few beers or to go to a civic event, like a Fourth of July celebration. Now these men were intensely

proud of their craft. And they often organized associations around their craft and marched in parades as leather workers or butchers, and so forth. They also engaged in competition, but not the same kind of competition that we would associate with. This is a pre-modern competition, where they competed with each other not on price—that would be undignified. They competed purely on quality. They charged all the same for bread, but they hoped their bread would stand out against the others, not because it was cheaper but because it was better. Another thing they did is they sold locally. They weren't looking for large markets. They were basically selling in the neighborhoods. This is a world not much different from 1600 A.D., or perhaps even 1500 A.D., maybe even earlier than that.

The first product that will be industrialized in this pre-modern world will be textiles, that is, cloth. Let's look a little bit at how Americans produced cloth and clothing in the late-19th century. They did it in most cases by spinning their own thread by hand. They took that thread and wove it into textiles to make clothing, blankets, shirts, and so forth. This work was usually performed by women, usually in the home, and sometimes assisted by their children. It was slow, and it was laborious. And then the final product was not necessarily the finest clothing if you can imagine. It was very rough, and you had a very limited range of clothing, maybe grey, brown, and dark brown. That was it. So, you get the picture. The late 18th century American economy is traditional. It's pre-modern, it's low-tech, and it's small scale

Well, now that we've established the details of the world that's about to be completely rocked by industrialization, let's jump to the story of the man that made it happen, this man Samuel Slater that we mentioned. He's the "father of the American factory system," [as he is] sometimes known. Samuel Slater was born in Derbyshire, England, on June 9, 1768. He was the son of a really successful independent farmer. And more importantly he was the neighbor of Jedediah Strutt. Strutt was a prominent pioneer in textile manufacturing and a partner of Sir Richard Arkwright, who was the great inventor of the spinning frame. It's the invention that revolutionized the production of cotton yarn. Young Slater grows up in this atmosphere on a farm but also near all this new technology in this new Industrial Revolution, which is years ahead of what's going on in the United States. And as fate would have it, he early on showed that he had a mind for mechanics. He was good with his hands, and

he understood how things worked. And in 1782, Jedediah Strutt's neighbor began building a new factory, and he was impressed with Samuel Slater, and he asked his father if he could take him on as an apprentice. So Slater, at 14, went to work for Strutt and there he learned everything he possibly could about mills and machines. And there was a lot to learn because in those days mill owners like Strutt actually built their own machines. They didn't order them out of a catalog. So Slater got to participate from the ground up in industrialization. He was a hard-worker, and he was also very smart and was well motivated. Before long, he was named superintendent of this factory.

By this time, Slater was developing a bit of ambition. He was thinking big here about starting his own textile business. But when he looked around he saw he was not the only one. There were lot of people opening up these factories all over England, and he worried about the intense competition in actually making a living in this enterprise. Then he got his hands on a Philadelphia newspaper that somehow made its way to England. It had an interesting article about a man in Philadelphia who had received £100 from the government of Pennsylvania for designing a textile machine. Well, to Samuel Slater, America sounded like a place of great opportunity. So in 1789, 21-year-old Samuel Slater decided to head for America.

But there's one problem: England had banned the export of industrial machines or industrial designs. Many Britons and also many Americans in recent years had tried and failed to smuggle out these valuable secrets. Basically they failed because British customs officials were on the lookout for machinery in crates. And also for people who looked a little suspicious. They might have documents on them. And they searched people before they got on the piers to the boats to America. They were very successful in keeping these industrious secrets from making their way across the Atlantic Ocean. So when Slater decides to go he knows he has to be very, very careful. So when he decides to leave he didn't tell anybody. He doesn't want to tip off the officials. He doesn't take any plans, no designs, no prints whatsoever because he knows they'll be seized, and he might not be able to make it to America. He keeps them all in his head. You want to talk about intellectual property, he's got it all up here. Of course the British would call this not intellectual property. They would probably call it "industrial espionage," to use modern terminology.

After a voyage of about 66 days across the Atlantic, Samuel Slater landed in New York. He quickly took a job in a manufacturing firm, and he was shocked by the primitive state of the machinery. Then, only three weeks after he arrived in the U.S., he heard about a man named Moses Brown. Moses Brown was a successful Rhode Island merchant, a Quaker, and he was at this point quite successful. He had already cofounded what later became Brown University. But his focus had shifted from his earlier enterprises to manufacturing. He saw this as the next big thing. He had tried his hand in textile manufacturing and bought some crude machinery. But it wasn't going well, and somehow Samuel Slater heard about this guy. He was living in New York, and just three weeks after he arrived in America he wrote Moses Brown a letter.

Let's take a listen to what he wrote him, very solicitous of him:

Sir: A few days ago I was informed that you wanted a manager of cotton spinning, etc., in which business I flatter myself that I can give the greatest satisfaction, in making machinery, making good yarn ... as any that is made in England: as I have had opportunity, and an oversight of Sir Richard Arkwright's works, and in Mr. Strutt's mills upwards of eight years. If you are not provided for, [I] should be glad to serve you. Samuel Slater.

So he dashes off this letter off to Moses Brown and waits. Can you imagine if you're Moses Brown with plans to get into textile making but it's not going very well. He suddenly gets this letter. That's like being a guy interested in starting a computer company in the early 1980s who out of the blue received a job application from a young guy saying he's trained recently for several years with some guys named Steve Job and Steve Wosniak, the founders of Apple Computer. You bet he'd be pretty excited.

Well, Moses Brown, about a hundred years earlier, was very excited, and he responded immediately with an invitation to Samuel Slater and a very lucrative profit-sharing deal. Slater accepted and in January 1790 he arrived in Rhode Island to get started. The first thing Brown did was show Slater what he had already bought, what he had tried his hand at, the machinery, and Samuel Slater, this young guy who's only 21 is in an uncomfortable position.

He has to tell him Moses Brown that what he purchased was basically junk. It's never going to work. It's never going to produce anything of value. So, Brown is a little despondent, but then he says in your letter you not only said you could run my machinery but that you could build my machinery. I've got money, so get to work! Build me a textile factory.

Well, he does. It took time and lots of trial and error. Remember Slater is basically designing these machines from memory. He eventually does it. He built a small textile mill in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The big test came of this mill came on December 20, 1790, when he had to go from just having the mill operate in demo form to actually hooking it up to water power, because that's where you're really going to be able to see if it works. In late December Slater had to, with all of his investors watching, actually jump into the river and had to break the ice up by hand because it had been frozen over so that the wheel could turn. Well, once he got back and dried up his machinery, it worked! And it cranked out the first cotton yard made from automatic machines in America.

This first yarn was a very rough variety that was good for heavy cloth, maybe blankets and such. But Slater kept inventing and he kept designing and he soon developed the machinery and techniques that made more refined—and therefore more profitable—yarn for things like shirts and for stockings. The firm took on another partner and called themselves, Almy, Brown, and Slater. And they soon began to hire local farm families that were doing their own private weaving, to weave cloth from their yarn. And this turned out to be a brilliant idea: total and smashing success! They sold 8,000 yards of cloth within 10 months. So with this kind of success, Moses Brown wrote to Alexander Hamilton. He's excited. He thinks this is the next big thing. And it's happening. So he writes a letter to Alexander Hamilton. Why? Well, Hamilton is the Secretary of the Treasury of the new American government under the Constitution. Brown wants to get Hamilton's attention, so he writes him a letter and in the envelope he attaches a piece of fabric made from his factory. In this letter he urges Hamilton to adopt a tariff on foreign textiles. America, he says to him, can easily produce all the textiles it needs, if he would impose this tariff to keep British goods out. When Hamilton issued his famous, "Report on Manufactures," kind of a blueprint for the 19th-century Industrial Revolution, in December 1791, he actually referenced

Brown's and Slater's factory. He called it, "the manufactory at Providence [which] has the merit of being the first in introducing into the United States the celebrated cotton mill." So they are not only making cotton and making money, they're getting famous.

Almy, Brown, and Slater were soon producing more yarn than they could sell locally. So they began hiring agents to sell it in emerging industrial cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. They discovered that there was a huge demand for their yarn. This success led them invest more so in 1793 they opened a new, larger, and more productive factory. Well, Samuel Slater became a huge success. Over the next 20 years he opened seven more factories in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, the heartland of the early Industrial Revolution. Now we should point out one thing about Slater's initial workforce that's kind of interesting. It included many children. Now this may set off alarm bells, but we need to put it in context. This is very different kind of labor from the horrific child labor of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. You may have seen the Lewis Hines' photographs that capture the exploitation. This is a different kind of system. Slater adopted an early English industrial format where he hired entire families, usually poor farming families. And the families' children then worked with their families under the supervision of their parents, who would obviously be more kind and gentle than some strange floor manager.

In 1817 President James Monroe visited Pawtucket to see this wonder that was unfolding. He found the largest cotton mill in the U.S.—Samuel Slater's mill. It had 5,100 spindles. Slater personally gave the president a tour and showed off, not only his factory, but his original spinning frame from 1790—and it was still working 27 years later! By this time textile manufacturing had boomed all across New England. In 1815 there were 165 factories in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut alone. Many of them, not surprisingly, had been started by Slater's former employees.

One of the most famous textile enterprises, the Boston Manufacturing Company, was established in Waltham, Massachusetts, in 1814. Its origins might sound a little bit familiar. At least one part of the origin story. It was started by a man by the name of Francis Cabot Lowell. He was the son of a prominent Boston family. They'd made their money over hundreds of years

the old-fashioned way—in shipping. But young Francis Cabot Lowell was a man with an eye on the future, like Moses Brown, and he wanted to get into textile manufacturing. So in 1810 he went to England, and he toured all over England and visited every single textile manufactory that would let him in. Along with a friend, he memorized as much as he possibly could, the machinery and the technology in these factories. And then he went back to the United States. He was actually searched at the dockside because they had plans, but they were all up here. Once Lowell got back to the United States in 1813, he formed a partnership that in turn established the Boston Manufacturing Company. The Boston Manufacturing Company enjoyed immediate success. But it was different from Slater what Slater had set up. For one thing, it was a prototype of modern corporation. These guys actually sold shares of stock. They also in just a few years they move from Waltham to what would eventually become a full-blown industrial compound. This is Lowell, Massachusetts, often cited as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. And of course the original workforce there were “girls,” as they would call them—young women in their teens and early 20s who were from farming families and had very few other employment opportunities, and they seized the opportunity because they could make proportionately a lot more money to go toward their dowry to allow them to marry better and set them up for a better life. Lowell was the ultimate paternalist factory town. They hired these girls. They put them in dormitories under strict supervision. Lights out at a certain time. They monitored their reading material. They made sure they went to church. They had chaperones if they visited young men—very, very tightly controlled.

It’s worth pausing here to note that at this time Americans thought they were on the verge of establishing an ideal form of industrialization in sharp contrast to England. Let’s listen to how an early trade association in America described this enterprise. This came from 1817 from a group of manufacturers.

We are inclined to believe that in the British factories are found disgusting exhibitions of human depravity and wretchedness. But we cannot believe that the exercise of industry could ever be the cause of demoralizing any race of men. ... [They are saying industry in itself is not a bad thing. Let’s continue.] In this country

there are extensive manufactories, and yet no such consequences are observed. . . . We have, besides, none of those great manufacturing cities; nor do we wish for such. Our factories will not require to be situated near mines of coal, to be worked by fire or steam, but rather on chosen sites, by the fall of waters and the running stream, the seats of health and cheerfulness, where good instruction will secure the morals of the young, and good regulations will promote, in all, order, cleanliness, and the exercise of the civil duties.

Now that is a pretty rhapsodic description of industrial America, that it's different from England. No stinking cities full of poor people. Idyllic country scenes of a little factory situated next to a river. No smog. No stacks. No steam. No railroads. It's all going to be quite beautiful and idyllic.

We can see that these Americans are trying to merge the visions of Jefferson and Hamilton to create a republican industrialization. Jefferson favored a rural republic; Hamilton favored a more manufacturing, and didn't really mind the rise of great cities, a kind of merging of the two ideas. And maybe we can do both. Maybe we can have an American style industrialization that will be clean and moral and still very productive.

Samuel Slater was an old man by the 1830s when President Andrew Jackson toured his factory. He praised Samuel Slater for teaching America to spin. Listen to what Sam. It has a kind of funny spin on it: "Yes, Sir, I suppose I gave out the psalm, and they have been singing the tune ever since." Sing they did. By the time Slater died in 1835 America was producing \$47 million annually worth of cotton goods. This is a process that every year consumed 80 million pounds of cotton. We should note that this cotton is coming primarily from the American South so there is a strong link manufacturing in the North to slavery in the South.

At this point let's turn our attention to the ways in which the industrial revolution spread from textiles to pretty much everything else. Samuel Slater launched the Industrial Revolution with new technology, what at the time was cutting edge technology. But much of the Industrial Revolution was actually not driven by any new technology at all. It was happening in other areas. Changes instead were driven by new processes not new technology. How did

this happen? Basically, master craftsmen in particular trades in the 1820s and 1830s essentially began to absorb these industrial ideas, these notions that came along with the textile industry. They began to see new opportunities beyond their narrow neighborhoods. Take for example cordwainers. You remember what they do? Right. They're the ones that make shoes. In the 1830s some cordwainers—I mean we don't have a name for these people, who exactly they were. It's sort of an evolutionary process. But we can see it in documents. They began to break with the traditional artisanal way to make shoes, things that we talked about earlier. They subdivided the production process. They hired more apprentices and not journeymen. Remember journeymen are more expensive, and so you can hire apprentices. They taught the apprentices not the whole craft about how to make a shoe from start to finish but just one part, maybe you do the cutting of the leather, you do the stitching, and you put the heels on. Then they paid these young boys a "market wage" instead of "just wage." Instead of paying them a just wage, a wage they agreed upon, they basically paid them however low they could go. And if they could get somebody to work for less, they would go with that person instead, the modern way of thinking. The shoemaking industry is transformed. And note, it doesn't involve any new technology. They're still using the same scissors, the same awls, the same stitching. It's the process that's changed. They've changed the rules about how these things are going to be made. And of course, eventually, somebody will invent the machinery to make the shoes, but that intermediary step is important to keep in mind.

So some of these trades changed by new technology and some of them are changed by the introduction of new processes. But they all changed in accordance with new rules. Profit maximization—that becomes number one. Price competition. Maybe you want your product to be the best quality, but you'll sell more, if you can undercut your competitors price wise. Tremendous pressure to seek new markets to expand where you're selling stuff. And of course this ties in with the transportation revolution. You can reach new markets. This tremendous pressure and incentive for constant innovation, and also for risk taking. Borrowing money and so forth to see if you can make more money. In short, we see the ABCs of capitalism. It doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't happen evenly in every trade. But it happens. Pick any business in the mid-19th century—printing, cigar making,

shipbuilding, metal fabrication, tailoring, beer brewing—you name it, they are all affected by these new rules.

So Samuel Slater's impact was much, much bigger, much greater than more than just thread and textiles. He basically triggers a culture of innovation. Now let me ask you a question. Can we measure innovation? How do we measure it. How do we say American are getting more innovative. Well we have one way, and that's by measuring the number of patents filed at the Federal Patent Office. In the 1840s, Americans filed 4,500 patents, a record for that decade. The next decade, the 1850s, 20,000. The 1860s, 64,000. The 1870s 125,000. And up and up and up. It keeps going. We've been doing this ever since! Inventing, inventing, inventing.

Finally, let's consider a broader impact of the industrial revolution. In other words, how it influenced and reshaped virtually every aspect of American society, far beyond the workplace. The Industrial Revolution reshaped, let's say first and foremost, American values. Americans, in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, began to embrace consumption. The guiding principle before this time was something we might call republican simplicity. Even rich people would have just a few suits and a few pairs of shoes and live in a modest home. Not anymore. The range of goods available expanded and they become cheaper. It was eventually going to be fueled by advertising. We go from being a nation of modest needs to a society of insatiable want.

The Industrial Revolution also shaped and reshaped American health: It brought Americans more food and in greater variety. The Industrial Revolution also generated medical breakthroughs. All of this added up to longer life expectancy, which started to rise in the mid-19th century and has continued to rise ever since. The Revolution also reshaped American agriculture. Farming became more commercialized as farmers began to grow crops not for their own consumption, or the town's consumption, but for wider markets, commercial markets. And in so doing, farmers became increasingly more dependent on industrial technology, things like the railroad, mechanical plow, and mechanical reaper. You see how all these things are all interconnected.

The Industrial Revolution also reshaped American gender roles. One of the hallmarks of the Revolution is that it separated, slowly but surely, working home, in a rural society home was the place of work on the farm and so forth. Not any more. People have got to go to work now. And primarily men are going to go to work. So we develop an ideology of separate spheres, the idea that women belonged in the home raising children, and men belonged in the work place. That's a new innovation. We also see the Industrial Revolution creating smaller family size, because now that we're not farming, we don't need eight kids anymore. We just need two children or maybe three children.

The Industrial Revolution also reshaped American public education. Public education as we know it was actually being born in the 1830s at the very moment that the factory system was being popularized. And what do you think that was based on? That's right, the factory. Think about how schools are set up, with desks in nice neat rows, one person of authority in each room, that's the floor-manager in a factory essentially. And what governs when the begins? A bell. And very carefully laid out schedules. It's all based on the factory.

The Industrial Revolution also reshaped American entertainment. Industrialization of printing means an explosion of led to an explosion of printed matter in books, magazines, even music. The original music industry was sheet oriented. Well now you can generate thousands of sheets and essentially create hit music. And then of course you can industrialize the making of pianos. That's what the Fenway brothers would do. They'll create a cheap affordable piano, and then eventually phonographs. So these things are all tied together.

The Industrial Revolution reshaped American Living arrangements. It triggered rapid urbanization. In 1815 America was 95 percent rural. People lived in small towns. A hundred years later, it's 50 percent-plus urban. It was more than half urban society.

The Industrial Revolution even led to the invention of time. What do I mean by that? Yes, the industrialization invented our modern notions of time. Industrial discipline, running of these factories and such, required the introduction of clocks and schedules. Railroads certainly took this to the

next level. They created essentially standard time in our four national time zones, all coming from our railroad.

All this courtesy of the Industrial Revolution. And what I've just mentioned is just a partial list. So, now let's return to the question we asked at the outset: Was the Industrial Revolution truly a revolution? Hopefully the answer is obvious. It absolutely, positively, was.

Well it should be clear at this point that Samuel Slater's introduction of cotton mill technology in 1789 started a much larger revolution, one that we're still experiencing today.

For our next lecture we'll turn from the world of business to the world of politics to examine the pivotal election of 1800.

See you soon.

1800 Peaceful Transfer—The Election of 1800

Lecture 12

After more than two centuries of democracy, Americans are conditioned to expect a politician who loses an election to gracefully surrender his office to the winner. But in 1800, the new American nation had yet to test this principle. So when John Adams and the Federalists, after a close and bitter election, peacefully ceded power to the Jeffersonian Republicans, it marked an important, precedent-setting moment in the history of the young republic.

Often when we look back to America's founding, we imagine a Mount Olympus-like setting where near-godlike figures—free of jealousy, pettiness, self-interest, and greed—needed only a few meetings and a few documents to fashion a stable and enduring republic. When we think of Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton, Madison, and the rest in this manner, we are not only deluding ourselves, we're cheating ourselves out of the excitement and fun that is the messiness of history.

George Washington took office as the first president of the United States in 1789 and served for two terms. The new republic was tiny, poor, and vulnerable to the great European powers. To make matters worse, at least in Washington's eyes, its political leaders began to form factions, which would soon blossom into political parties. In the 18th century, it was a cardinal rule of republican ideology that political parties were dangerous and undesirable, that by their very nature they purposely promoted discord.

Party politics exploded in the administration of President John Adams. Adams had served as Washington's vice president for both terms and won the election of 1796, narrowly defeating Washington's secretary of state, Thomas Jefferson. Since the Constitution at the time stipulated that the second-place finisher automatically became vice president, Jefferson took the number two spot. But in the poisonous atmosphere of partisan politics, Federalist Adams's chief rival turned out to be his own Republican vice president.

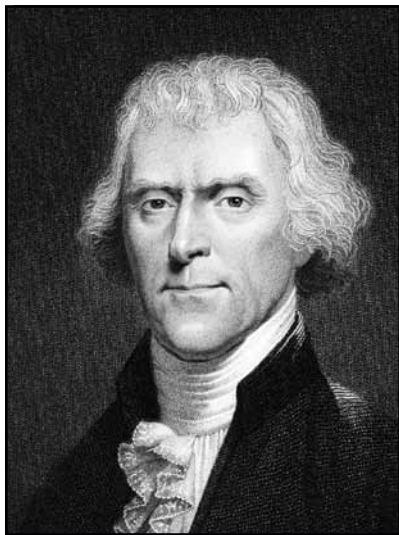
The Federalists and the Republicans disagreed over diplomatic relations; Adams wanted America to remain neutral in the war between England and France, whereas Jefferson believed that the nation should support France as an act of republican solidarity. Equally divisive were the disputes over crucial domestic issues. Federalists believed in a strong, centralized federal government; Republicans argued that such a government endangered republican liberty.

One of the key factors in promoting these partisan differences was the emergence of a partisan press. Because political journalism was relatively new, there were no established rules or accepted standards of conduct. As a result, partisan editors printed every malicious and damning falsehood about their opponents they could think up.

Adams was a brilliant man and dedicated patriot, but he was not a very good politician. In 1798, he made two big blunders that played right into the hands of his opponents. First, he authorized a significant increase in the size of the army and established the navy. In this period, republican ideology



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John Adams (*left*) and Thomas Jefferson (*right*), although both among the Founding Fathers, were bitter political rivals by the election of 1800.

argued that one of the greatest threats to liberty was a standing army because it always became a tool for a tyrant. Second, Adams signed the Alien and Sedition Acts into law. The Alien Acts raised the residency requirement for immigrants to become citizens from 5 to 14 years, empowered the president to expel aliens deemed dangerous, and authorized the president to expel or imprison aliens in wartime. The Sedition Act empowered the federal government to fine or imprison anyone who opposed “any measures of the government”; aided “any insurrection, riot, unlawful assembly, or combination”; and “wrote, printed, uttered, or published . . . any false, scandalous, and malicious writing” that disparaged the government. These measures, especially the Sedition Act, were blatantly aimed at suppressing Jeffersonian Republican criticism of the Adams administration.

Partisan editors printed every malicious and damning falsehood about their opponents they could think up.

The presidential race of 1800 was the first campaign in American history to pit competing political parties against each other. The result was one of the most vicious contests in American history. The election ended in a tie, and the ensuing uncertainty fueled conspiracy theories and created an even more tense political environment. Many feared violence and even civil war.

The decision was handed to the House of Representatives, who, after 36 ballots, remained deadlocked. Finally, on the 37th, Jefferson was declared the winner. America had just pulled off what no society had witnessed before: the peaceful transfer of power from the party in power to its chief rival. Throughout history, revolution had always been followed by infighting and then civil war. Despite the near miss of Shays’s Rebellion and the tensions of 1800, America broke the pattern.

In his remarks on inauguration day, March 4, 1801, Jefferson established a tradition in American politics that endures to this day: He struck a note of unity, saying “We are all Federalists. We are all Republicans.” By this he did not mean partisan politics had come to an end; rather, he meant that despite

the heated rhetoric and inflamed passions of the election, everyone involved was an American committed to the endurance of the republic. ■

Suggested Reading

Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*.

Larson, *A Magnificent Catastrophe*.

Questions to Consider

1. Did the Founding Fathers have a point when they argued that political parties are harmful to the health of a republic?
2. Is it unsettling or refreshing to consider how close the early republic came to disintegrating into civil war?

1800 Peaceful Transfer—The Election of 1800

Lecture 12—Transcript

OK! We meet again! Welcome back. Today we concern ourselves with one of the most important elections in American history. Now, America has certainly had its share of important elections. Think about the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828 that started the era of Jacksonian democracy. Or the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 when the fate of the union hung in the balance. Or the Rutherford B. Hayes's election in 1876, one of the most scandal-ridden elections in all of U.S. history. Or when Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 in the midst of the Great Depression. Or 1980 when Ronald Reagan was elected, ushering in an era of conservatism. But these elections are deemed important because of the time in which they occurred or because of the person who was elected. But today we deem the election of 1800 as significant for a deceptively simple reason: because it worked!

Well, let's take a moment, before we get started, to set out some objectives for this lecture. In this examination of the election of 1800, we'll focus on five key points. First we'll look at the extraordinarily divisive political scene in the 1790s. Then we'll move on to look at the emergence—against the wishes of most of the Founding Fathers—of political parties and political partisanship. Then we'll look at the election of 1800 itself, perhaps the dirtiest and most vicious presidential election of all time. Fourth, we'll look at the crisis that ensued when that election ended in a tie between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr. And then finally, we'll look at how the crisis was resolved, which allowed for the first peaceful transfer of power between rival political factions in modern world history.

So let's get started by looking at the rancorous politics of the 1790s. And when I say rancorous, I mean rancorous. One of the first things we need to do is to properly set the context for this lecture by dispelling some myths. When we look back to the founding period, we often imagine a Mount Olympus-like setting where near god-like figures with names like Washington and Franklin and Jefferson and Madison. And these men needed only a few meetings and a few documents to fashion a stable and enduring republic. I sometimes call this, "the marble period" in American history because in our imaginations, we often see the men who established the republic in the form

of these marble statues that now decorate the nation's public spaces today. We see these marble men as perfect, without the normal human fallibilities like jealousy, self-interest, pettiness, and greed.

When we think of Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton, and Madison and all the rest in this manner, we are not only deluding ourselves, we're cheating ourselves out of the excitement and fun that is the messiness of history. History properly understood is always messy. And no era in American history was messier—and arguably more dangerous because of that—than the 1790s.

Now as we all know, the nation's first president was George Washington. He took office in 1789 and served two terms. To say the least, his was not an easy job. The new republic was tiny, poor, and very vulnerable to the great European powers like England and France. To make matters worse, at least in Washington's eyes, the new republic's political leaders—including those in his own administration—began to form factions. And very soon these factions would soon blossom into political parties. Now to us in the 21st century, this seems perfectly normal. We think of parties as going hand in hand with democracy. But that is definitely not how most men of the Founding generation saw it—at least initially.

In the 18th century there was a cardinal rule of republican ideology that said political parties were dangerous and undesirable things. As a result, most of the Founders thought a republic was best served by a non-partisan elite, men like them who might differ on certain questions of policy but who at the end of the day nonetheless worked thing out for the good of the republic. In contrast, they saw parties as promoting only special interests and this to the detriment of the Common Good. In fact, they argued political parties, by their very nature, needed to promote rancor and discord to rally supporters and destroy opponents.

No one expressed these ideas more clearly than Washington in his Farewell Address. Let me read you what he wrote:

Let me ... warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party. ... It serves always to distract the

public councils and enfeeble the public administration. It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms; kindles animosity of one part against another.

And George Washington would know! Just listen to what Tom Paine, yes, *the* Tom Paine, of *Common Sense* fame, wrote about George Washington, the great Founding Father, in a Philadelphia newspaper in 1796: “As to you, sir, treacherous in private friendship, . . . and a hypocrite in public life, the world will be puzzled to decide whether you are an apostate or an imposter; whether you have abandoned good principles, or whether you ever had any.” Whew! That’s Tom Paine speaking of George Washington. It’s hard to think of anybody speaking of George Washington in that matter. It kind of gives you a taste of the times.

Well, this was only the beginning of party politics. It really exploded in the next administration, the administration of President John Adams. Adams had served as Washington’s vice-president for two terms and, according to the order of the day, he was the logical choice to succeed Washington when Washington announced his decision to retire at the end of his second term. Adams subsequently won the election of 1796, narrowly defeating Washington’s Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson.

The Constitution at this time stipulated that the second-place finisher would automatically become the vice-president. On the surface, this seemed to bode well for John Adams because he and Thomas Jefferson were friends. They had both served in Washington’s administration. But as it turned out, John Adams’s presidency was, in many ways, doomed from the start. For one, he succeeded the great Washington. Pretty much anyone in this position would pale by comparison. Can you name the guy who replaced the great Lou Gehrig when his illness finally forced him from the Yankees’ lineup? I didn’t think so. It was Babe Dahlgren, by the way.

But John Adams faced other problems beyond the towering legacy of George Washington. What really did John Adams in was an atmosphere of partisan politics even more extreme than that faced by Washington. And to make matters worse, Adams’s chief partisan rival turned out to be his own vice-president, Thomas Jefferson! I think we can all agree that this was not a

good thing for poor John Adams. So what were the key political issues that produced so much rancor and division in the 1790s?

There were many, but the first and foremost important was the diplomatic relations with England and France. John Adams, just like Washington and most Federalists, believed it was in the best interests of the fledgling United States to remain neutral in the raging war that was going on between England and France in the 1790s.

In part, this view reflected a general admiration among Federalists for England. They loved England. They revered its language, its culture, and its heritage. On the other hand, Adams and the Federalists were decidedly anti-France. They hated France or at least what it had become in the French Revolution in 1790s. And they expressed particularly abhorrence for the bloodshed and anarchy that ensued after the Revolution began in 1789.

Yet the Federalist position of neutrality also reflected a practical view of foreign affairs. Washington, Adams, Hamilton, and most Federalists recognized that the United States was weak and vulnerable and would definitely be destroyed if it joined either side of this great global war. But there soon emerged a group of men allied with Thomas Jefferson who took a very different view of the situation. These men, who soon took to calling themselves Jeffersonian Republicans, believed that the United States, had to support France against England, as an act of republican solidarity. Hadn't both The United States and France just staged Revolutions to overthrow oppressive monarchies? Didn't France provide us, the Americans, with vital military and financial support during the Revolution?

Jeffersonian Republicans charged that the Federalist hatred for France and their love of England exposed them as closet monarchists, people who would soon establish a monarchy and aristocracy in America modeled on that in England. "Federalism," asserted *The Aurora*, "[is] a mask for monarchy." The Federalists, though, shot back that Jeffersonian Republican support for France, revolutionary France, even after the revolution had turned into a bloodbath, in what we call the Reign of Terror in France, exposed Jefferson and the whole lot of them as wild-eyed anarchists, people not to be trusted with power. So that's one divisive issue.

A second divisive issue faced by the Adams's administration was over domestic issues. Ideologically, Adams, Hamilton, and most of the Federalists believed in a strong, centralized federal government. Indeed, we saw this in our previous lecture. These were the key figures behind the effort to scrap the Articles of Confederation in favor of a much stronger, centralized Constitution government. This vision of centralized power under Washington had translated into policies like establishing the Bank of the United States, assuming the state debts into one large federal debt, and establishing a tariff that would promote domestic manufacturing. On the other side of the ideological spectrum, Jeffersonian Republicans argued that a strong federal government endangered republican liberty. Instead, they favored small government, states' rights, and they were adamantly opposed to institutions like the Bank of the United States and policies like the tariff.

Now, one of the key factors in promoting these partisan differences between the emerging parties was the partisan press. Politicians were at this moment were just beginning to see the need to shape public opinion to make their party appear more virtuous and the opposing party more sinister. Now, because political journalism is relatively new at this point, there were absolutely no established rules. No accepted standards of conduct for the press. As a result, editors with ties to political factions printed pretty much every malicious, damning falsehood about their opponents they could possibly think up. One newspaper, *The Aurora* of Philadelphia, became the mouthpiece of the Jeffersonian Republicans. Its editors charged that John Adams was a scheming monarchist who planned to have himself named permanent king and his son, John Quincy Adams, named his hereditary successor. It's an interesting footnote to note that of the nation's first five presidents, Adams was the only one with an adult son, making him uniquely vulnerable to the charge that he planned to establish an Adams's dynasty. *The Aurora* also charged that Adams had secretly ordered a boatload of prostitutes from England to be delivered to the White House to satisfy his lustful passions. I mean this give you and idea of the tenor of the day. This is not very pretty. This is taking political invective to a new level.

The Aurora's opposite number was a journal with a great name, *The Porcupine Gazette*. It became the primary font of Federalist invective against the Jeffersonian Republicans. *The Porcupine*, as it was commonly

known, castigated Jefferson as an atheist and an anarchist. So it should be clear at this point that John Adams had many enemies who were gunning for him. But John Adams added to his troubles by committing two major political blunders during his administration. John Adams, as we all know, was a brilliant man who did much to advance the cause of American liberty and democracy. But he was not a very good politician, and in 1798 he made two decisions that played right into the hands of his Jeffersonian Republican opponents.

First, in May of 1798, he signed a bill that created a much larger army, over 15,000 soldiers, and added three naval vessels. Given the dangers the U.S. faced from warring England and France, this might seem to us—two hundred years later—a wise move to protect the country from attack. But republican ideology in the 18th century argued very clearly that throughout history one of the greatest threats to liberty appeared when a nation established what they called a “standing army.” Why? Why would establishing a standing army pose a threat? We have one now and we have liberties. The argument was that a standing army invariably enticed a tyrant to seize control of it and then use it to establish a dictatorship. They argued, wasn’t this how Caesar came to power? True republics, they argued, relied on citizen soldiers in times of danger, because they would return to civilian life once the crisis has passed. So you wouldn’t have an army. Just citizens called to arm, minute-man like, and then get back into private life as soon as the crisis passed. So when John Adams called for the establishment of a standing army and a much larger navy, Jeffersonian Republicans denounced it as a monarchist plot.

John Adams’s second mistake came also 1798 when he signed the Alien and Sedition Acts. The Alien Acts took aim at many recently arrived French and Irish immigrants, who had allied themselves with the Jeffersonians. Many of these immigrants from France and Ireland were radical so they were attracted to the ideas of the Jeffersonians. The Acts raised the residency requirement for immigrants from five to 14 years, which means they wouldn’t be eligible to vote for 14 years. It also empowered the president to expel any aliens he deemed dangerous, and authorized the president in wartime to expel or imprison aliens as a matter of national security.

The Sedition Act empowered the federal government to fine or imprison anyone who opposed “any measures of the government” or who “wrote, printed, uttered, or published ... any false, scandalous, and malicious writing” that disparaged the government. These measures, especially the Sedition Act, were clearly intended to suppress Republican criticism of the Adams’s administration. Nearly all the men indicted under these Alien and Sedition laws were Jeffersonian Republican politicians and editors. In all, about 25 men were arrested and 10 convicted.

Now, we should point out that Adams was not the driving force behind these laws, but the Jeffersonian press made certain the public saw him as responsible. And in fact, John Adams did sign the laws. The election of 1800 It was in this poisoned political environment that John Adams ran for re-election.

Now let’s turn our attention to the election of 1800. In this poisoned political environment that John Adams ran for re-election. The campaign was the first in American history to pit competing political parties against each other. And the results were not pretty. Indeed, many historians consider this election of 1800 the most vicious in American history. Through their newspapers, pamphlets, and speeches, both parties claimed that the very fate of the Republic was at stake. Jeffersonians charged that Federalists planned to create an American monarchy and an aristocracy modeled on that in England. “The foundation of a monarchy is already laid,” thundered the Republican named Abraham Bishop, “a Monarchy is decidedly before us.”

Federalists fought back and charged Jeffersonians with supporting atheism and anarchy. Let me just read you one of these typical passages: “If Jefferson is elected and the Jacobins get into authority,” declared a Federalist pamphleteer, “those morals which protect our lives from the knife of the assassin, which guard the chastity of our wives and daughters from seduction and violence, defend our property from plunder and devaluation, and shield our religion from contempt and profanation, will be trampled upon and exploded.” Well this gives you an idea of the charged political rhetoric. You basically say anything about your opponent and always imply that they were the ones who if they get into power they would destroy the Republic.

This is also the beginning of political cartoonage era. And both sides generated a lot of imagery to make their points. One of these cartoons was called “The Providential Detection.” It’s an anti-Jefferson cartoon. It shows Jefferson holding the Constitution in his hand just about to put it into a fire and burn the Constitution. And an eagle has come out of the sky to prevent him from doing so. It gives you an idea of the political venomous character of the political rhetoric at that time.

Many people listening to this rhetoric and hearing these speeches and these torch-like procession, and so forth, really feared, quite understandably, that civil war was about to break out. One wrote, “Our country is so divided and agitated, as to be in some danger of civil commotions.” “Civil commotions” is a polite way of saying civil war. And another observer wrote, “It is impossible the union can much longer exist.” This is in the weeks leading up to the election.

To make matters worse, the election ended in a tie, and the ensuing uncertainty between election day and inauguration day simply fueled more conspiracy theories and created an even more tense and fractious political environment. Many feared violence and even more likely that there was a chance for civil war.

So how did it turn out? Well, first we need to remind ourselves how this electoral system worked in those days. Presidents in the early republic were not elected by the people but rather by a group of “electors” chosen from each state to form what we call the Electoral College. These men were elected—some, by their state representatives, and some of them were elected by the people in their states. They were instructed to vote for a candidate from a short list of leading contenders. In 1800, that short list included two Federalists, the sitting president, John Adams, and Thomas Pinckney, a prominent politician from South Carolina. It also included two Jeffersonians, Thomas Jefferson himself, and Aaron Burr of New York. After months of blistering political rhetoric in public and all kinds of clever scheming and dealing behind the scenes to influence the votes of these electors, the results were eventually tabulated and announced to the public. Jefferson had 73 votes. Aaron Burr had 73 votes. Adams, 65. Comes Pinckney, 64. And John Jay got a single vote.

According to the Constitution, a tied vote in the Electoral College meant that the election between the top two finishers would be decided by a vote in the House of Representatives. But this was no simple matter. And between the announcement of the tie vote and the election in the House of Representatives all kinds of backroom politicking in Washington and every place else. People were trying to use persuasion, threats, making promises, trying to strike deals to influence the vote of the representatives. Eventually, the House convened and began balloting.

For 36 straight ballots the vote remained tied. Not a single representative seemed willing to change their vote. The atmosphere grew incredibly tense. Keep in mind here Inauguration Day is only a few days off and we still have not decided who's president. Keep further in mind that the Republic is very new, only a few years old. People are still considering this a Republic experiment because they know it's very fragile. And here is real evidence that the Republic was very fragile and could disintegrate at any moment right before everybody's eyes. While this crisis unfolded, some people hoped and tried to encourage Aaron Burr to step aside to allow Thomas Jefferson to win the election, but they quickly discovered that Aaron Burr was far too ambitious to do such a thing. He was hoping that he would be the next president. Finally, on the 37th ballot, the log jam was broken, and Jefferson declared the winner. It was a very tense and very messy process, but the leaders of the American republic had just managed to pull off what no society had ever witnessed before: the peaceful transfer of power from the party in power to its chief rival.

We should really stop and ponder the enormity of this accomplishment and see why, if properly understood, it is a turning point in American history. Throughout history, the story of revolutions nearly always goes like this: A group of patriots rise up and overthrow an oppressive regime. And then, often before the smoke has even cleared, they begin to wage war on each other. In other words, the normal pattern in history is a revolution followed by a civil war. Think of the many, many examples. The top two that I can think of is the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution. Both were followed by very bloody civil wars.

But Americans in the 1790s and the election of 1800 found a way to avoid this trap on several occasions after the Revolution. In the 1780s, Shays's Rebellion threatened to tear the country apart in civil war. But we overcame that. Ten years later in the Whiskey Rebellion in the 1780s and 1790s, another threat to order and big government and to threat potential civil war. But somehow that was overcome as well. And these two examples are actually pale in comparison to what was at stake in the election of 1800. In this effort to avoid civil war, the Founding Fathers certainly benefited from many things. They benefited from a little luck, but they also benefited from principled leadership by the key figures and a broad commitment to high ideals, to republican government of the key people involved.

We can see these factors at work the day that Jefferson was inaugurated. In his remarks on Inauguration Day, March 4, 1801, Thomas Jefferson established a tradition in American politics that endures to this very day. He struck a note of unity. He acknowledged the bitterness of the campaign but called for a return to civility. Let's listen to what Jefferson had to say: "This [election] being now decided by the voice of the people ... let us restore to social intercourse that harmony and affection without which liberty, even life itself, are but dreary things." Jefferson went on to say that disagreements over public policy should not be characterized as struggles between good and evil. Listen further: "Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle." And one of his most famous lines? "We are all federalists. We are all republicans." By these words he did not mean partisan politics had come to an end—far from it. But he did mean that despite the heated rhetoric and inflamed passions of the election, deep down inside everyone involved was an American, committed to the endurance of the Republic. We also should note a separate but equally important theme that Jefferson struck in his inauguration. Jefferson, unlike Washington and Adams before him, chose to walk to his inauguration, a symbol of republican simplicity and democracy, because he thought the Federalists had put a little too much pomp and circumstance, a little too royal in the way they arrived at their inaugurations in great coaches in all kinds of delivery servants and so forth. And Jefferson also chose to wear a plain suit when he walked to his inauguration. And it's really important to see that he has established Jeffersonian democracy. That's essentially what we're looking at here, Jefferson striking that tone of republican simplicity to offset that tone of Federalists—now we don't

want to call the Federalists monarchists, but certainly what he perceived as Federalist elitism.

Now, we know that Jefferson's inauguration did not mark the end of divisive partisan politics. I mean just to cite one example, just three years after Jefferson took office, his vice president, Aaron Burr, killed the former Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton in a duel. Think about this. The current vice president killing the recently out of office secretary of the treasury. Pretty incredible. It gives us an idea of the times. This dispute was purely political, and the reason why this happened at all is that Burr was furious with Hamilton because he found out that Hamilton had used his influence in 1800 and 1801 to swing the election away from Burr and to Thomas Jefferson. And he was right in believing this.

On a happier note, and one that illustrates the ability of political rivals to settle their differences in a peaceful manner, we have the remarkable story of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. Once political friends and political allies, they'd become bitter enemies in the factional politics of the 1790s. They basically stopped talking to each other. But in 1812, after both had entered retirement, they resumed their friendship by commencing an incredible exchange of letters.

"You and I ought not to die," wrote Adams to Jefferson, "before we have explained ourselves to each other." And explain they did—until all the bitterness that had built up between them in the vicious election of 1800 had essentially withered away. The Adams-Jefferson correspondence carried on for more than 10 years, until their deaths on July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Think about it. Two of the greatest Founding Fathers dying on the same day on the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. You can't make this stuff up! People at the time, of course, took it as a great sign that God had essentially bestowed a blessing on the Republican Experiment.

This remarkable story of Adams and Jefferson setting aside these bitter differences to resume a friendship symbolizes the principle established in the election of 1800, that no matter how bitter our political differences, citizens of a republic need to find ways to resolve them in a peaceful and civil manner.

They need to keep in mind that just because they disagree really intensely on key issues, it does not mean that their opponents are bent on destroying the nation. They also need to retain a faith in the democratic process, faith that the democratic process to sort these disagreements out.

Well, that does it for the election of 1800. In our next lecture, we'll turn our attention to the famous Supreme Court case, *Marbury v. Madison*, the case that established the authority of the court to rule on the constitutionality of laws.

Thank you.

1803 Supreme Authority—*Marbury v. Madison*

Lecture 13

***Marbury v. Madison* was one of the defining cases of the U.S. Supreme Court because it established the principle of judicial review—that is, that the Supreme Court is the final arbiter of whether a law or action by a public official is constitutional. Since that time, the Supreme Court has played a central role in determining the course of American history.**

Most Americans see the Supreme Court as extremely powerful, and many historians, political scientists, and legal scholars argue that one of the most important powers of the modern presidency is the power to name Supreme Court justices, who will shape the ideology of the court for years or decades to come. But like many institutions, the Supreme Court has evolved over the centuries; when it was established, its powers and purpose were not at all clear.

Marbury v. Madison was the first major step in carving out the court's clear and increasingly powerful role in the federal government. The case arose out of justice of the peace commissions for William Marbury and 42 others signed by John Adams on March 3, 1801, but not delivered before Thomas Jefferson took the presidential oath of office the next morning. Adams's secretary of state, John Marshall, whom he had also appointed chief justice of the Supreme Court, was responsible for the delivery, but he believed the commissions were official the moment they were signed and sealed. Jefferson disagreed, threw out the undelivered commissions, and made his own appointments.

Marshall detested Jefferson and feared his Republican views. So when William Marbury petitioned the court about his commission in December 1801, Marshall seized the chance to strike a blow at Jefferson's administration. Because Marshall was intimately involved in the controversy, today he would have to recuse himself, but in 1801, there were no such precedents. Marshall also wanted to assert and expand the power of the court to become coequal with the legislative and executive branches—an idea not

explicitly articulated in the Constitution. Marshall's decision in *Marbury v. Madison* would establish the principle of judicial review.

Marshall began investigating Marbury's case by issuing an order to the new secretary of state, James Madison, asking him to explain the administration's position. Madison ignored Marshall's order. The Supreme Court met on February 9, 1803, to begin hearing Marbury's case. Marbury's lawyers easily proved that the commissions had existed, but no one from Jefferson's administration showed up to explain where they had gone. The Jefferson administration was boycotting what they considered a politically motivated and legally questionable proceeding.

Marshall found himself with only two choices, both bad: Issue the writ of mandamus ordering Madison to produce the commissions and risk a public snubbing, or even impeachment, by a popular president, or let the administration cow him into ruling against Marbury.

In the end, Marshall came up with a brilliant third option: He declared that Marbury and the other petitioners were entitled to their commissions and that Madison, in failing to honor the commissions, had acted "in plain violation" of the law but that the Supreme Court could not issue the writ requested by Marbury to compel Madison to produce the commissions because the section of the 1789 Judiciary Act that empowered the Court to issue them was unconstitutional.

Legal scholars have written extensively on the soundness of this decision. Most agree that Marshall's reading of the Constitution was questionable at best. But Marshall was willing to sacrifice the right to issue writs to achieve something much more valuable to the Court: the right to render void any law it deemed in violation of the Constitution.

The idea of judicial review did not actually originate with Marshall; some states had already empowered their courts in this way. But Marshall's ruling was its first clear and forceful articulation.

America would not see another federal law nullified by the Court until 1857, when the Court issued the *Dred Scott* decision, which ruled the Missouri

Compromise unconstitutional. Not until after the Civil War did the court invoke judicial review on a more regular basis in decisions reflecting conservative views on race. It also employed judicial review to fend off attempts by states to limit the power of railroads and other large corporations.

The Jefferson administration was boycotting what they considered a politically motivated and legally questionable proceeding.

In the 1930s, the Supreme Court began to defer more and more to the will of Congress and state

legislatures. Then, from the 1950s to the 1990s, a more liberal Supreme Court used judicial review to strike down laws that violated constitutional guarantees to individual rights and established the existence of new, implicit rights in the Constitution, such as the right to privacy. Since the 1990s, the ideological composition of the court has grown more conservative, and its use of judicial review has tended to strike down laws limiting private property rights, the rights of corporations, and the rights of individuals to own guns. ■

Suggested Reading

Goldstone, *The Activist*.

Nelson, *Marbury v. Madison*.

Sloan and McKean, *The Great Decision*.

Questions to Consider

1. How have decisions made by the Supreme Court shaped American history? What decisions would you rank as the most important?
2. Since judicial review is not specified in the Constitution, how do you think the Founding Fathers would feel about the enormous power and influence enjoyed by the Supreme Court in present-day America?

1803 Supreme Authority—*Marbury v. Madison*

Lecture 13—Transcript

Welcome back. It's time, once again, to explore a key turning point in American history. Today, we look at one of the great moments in American Constitutional history: the famous Supreme Court decision *Marbury v. Madison*. Let's start out by thinking about the role of the Supreme Court in American life. Most Americans see the Court as extremely powerful. Let's just consider a couple of landmark cases: *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 (that's the case that declared segregation unconstitutional); *Miranda v. Arizona* in 1966 (that's the case that required police to advise criminal suspects of their rights to remain silent and to consult with an attorney); in 1971, the *New York Times v. the United States* (that's the decision, you may remember, which upheld the First Amendment right of the media to publish the so-called "Pentagon Papers" concerning the war in Vietnam); *Roe v. Wade*, 1973 (that case legalized abortion); *Bush v. Gore* in 2000 (that's the decision that declared George W. Bush the winner in the controversial 2000 presidential election); *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* in 2010 (that case struck down as violating free speech any restrictions on campaign donations by large organizations like unions and corporations).

These and many, many other Supreme Court decisions have had a deep and profound impact on the course of American history. Most historians, political scientists, and legal scholars argue that one of the most important powers of the modern presidency—a power more important than that waging war and vetoing legislation—is the power to name Supreme Court justices. Their choices usually reflect their political ideology when it comes to the law, so their ability to name new justices gives them power to shape the ideology of the Court; and since justices serve for life, these choices have an impact on American law and politics for years, often decades, after the President has left office. But it hasn't always been this way; indeed, the Supreme Court has evolved as an institution over the centuries. The power that the Court now wields in the 21st century has been acquired through this evolution; and indeed, as we'll see, when it was established under the Constitution, the powers, the purpose, and the function of the Supreme Court were not at all clear.

The first major step in carving out a clear and increasingly powerful role for the federal government was taken in 1803 in the case of *Marbury v. Madison*. That's what we're going to talk about today; but before we go any further into this remarkable story, let's set out some objectives for this lecture. We'll focus on four things: First, we'll start out by examining the political dispute that led Mr. Marbury to sue Mr. Madison (we'll talk about who those people are in a moment). Next, we'll stop to assess the uncertain status of the Supreme Court in the early republic and how it eventually started to evolve into a more powerful institution. Then we'll explore in some detail how Chief Justice John Marshall crafted his famous decision in *Marbury v. Madison* and how it established this crucial principle called "judicial review." Then finally, we'll examine how this principle of "judicial review" has influenced and shaped American history since 1803.

OK, let's start by examining the political dispute that led one Mr. Marbury to sue one Mr. James Madison. You will recall from our previous lecture that the politics of the 1790s were divisive and vicious, to say the least. Federalists—people like George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and John Adams—were the dominant political force in the decade, and they presided over the early years of the new republic as it took form under the new Constitution. Federalists like John Adams were convinced in the 1790s that Jefferson was a wild-eyed, atheistic, French Revolution-loving radical, and they feared his presidency would destroy the republic. So in the time between his defeat (Adams's defeat) in the election of 1800 and March 4, 1801—when the new President would be sworn in—President John Adams worked diligently to put as many Federalist judges in place; and with the presidency and Congress soon to be taken over by Jeffersonian Republicans, he believed (Adams did) that it was his duty to make the courts a bulwark against their dangerous ideas and legislation.

He was helped in this effort early on in 1801 by two events: First, the sitting Chief Justice of the Supreme Court retired; so John Adams named his Secretary of State, John Marshall, to the post. John Marshall was a prominent Federalist and a lawyer from Virginia, and at the time, he was Secretary of State. There were no laws saying that if you get named Supreme Court Justice you have to resign that commission, so he actually held both positions for a period of time; and this is actually going to add an interesting

wrinkle to this case of *Marbury v. Madison*, as we'll see. The second thing that happened was that Adams was also helped by the Federalist-controlled Congress in early 1801, because that Congress passed the Judiciary Act of 1801. This did two things: It reduced the Supreme Court to just five justices, and then it also greatly expanded the number of federal judgeships. Adams, over the next few months, dutifully filled these posts with Federalists; and as the story goes, he kept at this effort right up until the evening before Jefferson took the oath of office. That evening—March 3, 1801—he signed commissions for 42 new justices of the peace; judges in what amounted to small-claims courts in Maryland, Virginia, and DC.

As the story goes, Adams finished his work at about 9:00 pm and then sent them to Secretary of State John Marshall. His job was to affix the Seal of the United States on the commissions and have them delivered to the new justices. Given the late hour at which all this occurred, Jeffersonians would later decry these appointments as “midnight judges,” perhaps the first “sound bite” in the early republic. But Marshall didn't deliver the commissions. Marshall later explained why he didn't deliver them: “I did not send out the commissions because I apprehended such ... to be completed when signed and sealed.” Basically, he said, “I thought once I signed and sealed them, it was a done deal. The incoming administration would end up delivering them; they'd have to, they would have no choice.” But Marshall also said that he would have delivered them if he could that evening “but for the extreme hurry of the time and the absence of [a clerk] who had been called on by the President to act as his private secretary.” In other words, he was out of time and he was also out of help; basically, President Adams borrowed his secretary that evening, so he didn't have anybody to carry out the delivery.

On the next day, March 4, 1801, Jefferson took the oath of office; and as you'll remember from our earlier lecture, he tried to strike a note of unity and cooperation in this inaugural address. He said, if you'll remember, “we are all republicans, we are all federalists.” Jefferson knew just how much the Federalists hated him and feared him; so one of his first goals as President was to mollify their fears and win their trust. But when he realized how many of his “most ardent political enemies” that Adams had appointed to the judiciary, he was furious; and unfortunately for Jefferson, there was little he could do to reverse this “outrage on decency,” as he termed it. But

when he learned that there sat in the State Department a stack of undelivered commissions to 42 of Adams's justice-of-the-peace appointees, Jefferson ordered that they not be delivered. Then Jefferson created a new list of appointees, and he reduced basically the number from 42 to 30, and then issued these people commissions.

So what happened to that stack of Adams's commissions; those 42 that lay in the State Department's office? Historians assume that Jefferson's acting Secretary of State, Levy Lincoln, simply disposed of them (and at this point, Levy Lincoln is Acting Secretary of State because James Madison had not yet arrived in Washington to take up his post). One of these commissions—one of the 42—had been for a man named William Marbury, and he would eventually file the suit against Secretary of State Madison that would bring us this case that we're talking about. And so it was that one of the most momentous legal decisions in American history stemmed from a very small overnight concerning the delivery of commissions for several dozen extremely minor public officials (these are, after all, justices of the peace). This brings to mind one of our themes in these lectures: the fact that history is the study of surprises. I don't think anybody in Washington or the United States was thinking that this little snafu was going to basically set major legal precedent for the rest of the country's history.

Jefferson's next move was to prod Congress to repeal the Judiciary Act of 1801 that had created all those new judicial posts that Adams had filled with Federalists. This move alarmed the Federalists, especially the new Chief Justice, John Marshall. John Marshall detested Jefferson, even though they were actually distant relatives; and Marshall immediately—because he hated him so much and feared him so much—began looking for ways to use his position to push back against the Administration. Unfortunately for Marshall, there were only a few possibilities, and in each case his fellow justices opposed him. For example, he wanted them to join him in ruling that the repeal of the 1801 Judiciary Act was unconstitutional, but the other justices balked. Remember, the Court doesn't have much power at this point, so they're kind of afraid to try to flex their muscles. Then in December 1801, along came a seemingly minor case submitted by a man named William Marbury. Maybe, thought Marshall, this case would provide him

the opportunity to use the power of the Supreme Court to strike a blow at Jefferson's administration.

Let's pause a moment here to think about who was this guy, William Marbury? As we noted, he's one of the 42 men appointed justice of the peace by John Adams, but who was denied this office by Jefferson's decision to withhold the signed and sealed commissions. At the time, Marbury was a 41-year-old man from Maryland, who in recent years had moved to Washington and served as a loyal Federalist as an aide to the first Secretary of the Navy; so he's a loyal Federalist, getting this appointment clearly through these connections. Marbury joined with several other Federalists who had been denied their justice of the peace positions and asked the Supreme Court to issue a writ of mandamus—a "mandamus" is basically a Latin word that means "we command," so a "writ of mandamus" is an order—in this case, an order instructing the Secretary of State, James Madison, to deliver those signed and sealed commissions, which were now called the "missing commissions."

In case you haven't made the connection yet, it's important to point out here that the Chief Justice of the Court, John Marshall, had played a key role in this whole "missing commissions" controversy, because he was the man who failed to deliver them the night before the inauguration. If this case was taking place today, a Justice of the Court in a similar position would have to "recuse" himself or herself from hearing the case. But as we pointed out, in 1801, there were no rules or precedents; they're basically making this up as they go along, so Justice Marshall took up the case with enthusiasm.

Now before we go any further, we need to take a close look at the uncertain status of the Supreme Court in the early republic. As we noted in our introduction, the precise power and function of the Supreme Court were not at all clear in 1803. Let's start out by looking at how little the Constitution actually says about the Supreme Court, to get a sense of where all this uncertainty comes from. Let's take a moment to look at that: In Sections 1 and 2 of Article III, the Constitution reads:

The judicial Power of the United States, shall be vested in one supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may

from time to time ordain and establish. ... The judicial Power shall extend to all Cases, in Law and Equity, arising under this Constitution, the Laws of the United States, and Treaties ...

That's one part where it talks about the Court; a second part comes from Article VI and it reads:

This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof; and all Treaties ... shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby, any Thing in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding.

The Constitution has only a few things to say about exactly what the Court's function is going to be; and one reason for such vague language is that many people, especially those Anti-Federalists who had opposed the Constitution, feared any kind of strong power in the federal government, especially a strong judiciary. But on the other side of the ledger, the Federalists—the ones who supported a strong federal government—thought a strong federal judiciary was essential to binding the new nation together into a coherent system of laws.

The first step towards clarifying exactly what the federal judiciary would look like came when the first Congress passed the Judiciary Act of 1789. This was the act that established the number of justices on the Supreme Court at six: one Chief Justice and five Associates. The first Chief Justice was John Jay, who was named by President George Washington. By the way, we should note here that the number of justices is not specified in the Constitution, and it's fluctuated pretty widely over the centuries. There were 6 in 1789; and then that was reduced to 5 in 1801; increased to 7 in 1807; then to 9 in 1837; there were 10 justices during the Civil War; then 7 in 1866; and then back up to 9 in 1869, and that's where it's stayed ever since. The Judiciary Act of 1789 also established 13 district courts and 3 circuit courts of appeal where two of the three judges would be justices of the Supreme Court. So how did all this work out in practice?

Well, for starters, the justices of the Supreme Court spent much of their time on the road to serve as judges in these three circuit courts of appeals. It was, to say the least, not a glamorous life. Imagine lots of seedy boarding houses and roadside inns; this is for justices of the Supreme Court, kind of a far cry from what we picture today. In addition, the Court decided only a small number of cases in its early years: it only decided two cases in 1791, three in 1793, six in 1798. Some of these cases were important, but they're hardly ones that garnered any public attention. By the mid-1790s, Chief Justice John Jay had come to the conclusion that the Court lacked what he said was "energy, weight, and dignity," so he resigned to run for governor of New York. He thought, "This job is going nowhere, I want real political power"; so he ran for governor of New York. Another sign of this time of the low opinion of the Court is when the federal government made the move to the new, permanent capital in Washington, DC, no one thought to provide a building for the Supreme Court; so for many years, the US Supreme Court met in a small clerk's office in the basement of the Capitol building (think about that). This rather sad state of affairs began to change when President John Adams named John Marshall as Chief Justice of the Court in January of 1801. Marshall was a staunch Federalist and he wanted to assert and expand the power of the Court to become a branch of the federal government that was coequal with the Legislative and the Executive branches; and this was an idea not explicitly articulated in the Constitution, as we saw.

Now let's turn to a careful examination of how Chief Justice John Marshall crafted his famous decision in *Marbury v. Madison*, and how it established this crucial principle that we'll call "judicial review." As we noted earlier, Chief Justice John Marshall took up the case with enthusiasm. He saw it as a superb opportunity to attack Jefferson and the Republicans. So he issued an order to Secretary of State James Madison asking him to explain why the Court should not issue the order requested by Marbury; that order that Madison had to hand over the missing commissions. What did James Madison do? He ignored Marshall's order. What happened next? Nothing happened for many, many months, for reasons we won't go into; but finally, on February 9, 1803, the Supreme Court began to hear the case.

In this case, the lawyer for Marbury and the other plaintiffs—these other people that had not received their commissions—Charles Lee, produced

ample evidence and witnesses, including State Department clerks who were involved in the preparation of the commissions in question, to show pretty conclusively that the commissions in question had indeed been signed and sealed. Then it came time for the Administration to make its case; only, no one showed up. When asked why, the Attorney General Levy Lincoln replied disdainfully that, “he had [received] no instructions on the subject” regarding appearing before the Court. In other words, this meant that the Jefferson administration had decided not to dignify what they considered a politically motivated and legally questionable proceeding. They were essentially boycotting it; or, more precisely, they were calling Chief Justice Marshall’s bluff.

At this moment, Chief Justice Marshall found himself on the horns of a very tricky dilemma. As he saw it, he had two choices, both of which might be disastrous to him, the Court, and the Federalist Party. His first option was to issue the writ of mandamus ordering Madison to produce these missing commissions; but given the attitude of the Administration, Madison would most likely ignore this order, and he would do so with Jefferson’s full approval, Jefferson’s blessing. What would happen then? The only thing that might compel Jefferson and Madison to comply was this order was public opinion; but Jefferson was still enjoying enormous popularity from his recent election, and Marshall knew this. There was still another risk if he issued this writ, this order: Jeffersonians might institute impeachment proceedings against him. In fact, the Jeffersonians did impeach another justice that same year, Samuel Chase; so this was not an unlikely possibility. If that succeeded—if Marshall was impeached—he’d be ruined personally; the Supreme Court would also be reduced to a weak and servile tool of the executive branch, something he did not want. A second option that Marshall had was to rule against Marbury and the other petitioners; to deny their claim to these commissions. But this would amount to a surrender of his political principles and a total capitulation to Jefferson and the Republicans. As with option number one, this would dramatically reduce what little power and prestige the Court had. So what was John Marshall to do? Like I said, he’s facing a tremendous dilemma here.

Over the next 10 days, Marshall searched for a third option; and in the end, he came up with a brilliant solution that allowed him to do a number of things:

First, it allowed him to uphold the validity of Marbury’s petition; that he had a right to his commission as Justice of the Peace. It also allowed Marshall to hammer President Jefferson and his administration, so he could strike back a little bit at them. Third, it allowed him to protect himself and the Court from attack, from impeachment. How did he do this? In his ruling, Marshall declared that, first of all, Marbury and the other petitioners were indeed entitled to their commissions. Second, he ruled that Madison, in failing to honor the commissions, had acted “in plain violation” of the law. But—and here’s the brilliant part of this decision—Marshall said the Supreme Court could not issue the writ requested by Marbury to compel Madison to produce the commissions because the section of the 1789 Judiciary Act, the one that empowered the Court to issue them, was unconstitutional. In other words, Marshall said I would rule against the Administration and in favor of Marbury because they’re on the side of right, but I can’t because the law that gives me the right to do so is unconstitutional. This is very clever reasoning, as you can see.

Legal scholars have written extensively on the soundness of this decision; and most of them agree that Marshall’s reading of the Constitution was questionable at best. Any reasonable reading of the relevant sections would find that it did empower the Court to issue writs in cases just like the one that Marbury had brought. But Marshall was willing to sacrifice that right to achieve something much, much more valuable to the Court: the right to render “void” any law it deemed in violation of the Constitution. As Marshall explained in his decision, the Constitution is “the supreme law of the land,” and as a result, “the constitution controls any legislative act repugnant to it.” This was, he wrote, “one of the fundamental principles of our society”; therefore, “[i]t is emphatically the province and duty of the judicial department to say what the law is,” i.e., for the Supreme Court to determine a law’s constitutionality. If the Court determined that a law was not constitutional, it must overturn it. “A law repugnant to the Constitution,” concluded Marshall, “is void.” In short, John Marshall had established the principle of “judicial review”: the authority of the Supreme Court to rule on the constitutionality of laws and to nullify them if they found them in violation.

This idea of judicial review did not originate with Marshall. There were some vague notions of judicial review that had developed in England and America in the 17th and 18th centuries; and in the 1780s, several states had empowered their courts to nullify state laws. Alexander Hamilton, in *Federalist 78*, had outlined a theory of judicial review. But Marshall's ruling was the first clear and forceful articulation of this principle. So now, with the principle of judicial review established, let's turn now to looking at how this principle influenced and shaped American history after 1803.

Significantly—this is really quite amazing when you study the case and the history of it—Chief Justice Marshall never again invoked the Court's right to strike down a federal law, and he served on the Court until 1835; so three decades more. But Marshall did reaffirm in many subsequent cases the Court's right to assess the constitutionality of laws; they just didn't use that power to strike any down. Marshall also claimed greater and greater authority for the Court over state legislatures and lower courts. In a word, he promoted the supremacy of federal authority when it came to matters of law.

America would not see a federal law nullified by the Court until 1857, when the Court issued its infamous Dred Scott decision. Dred Scott was an African American who sued for his freedom on the basis of the fact that he'd spent several years living in a free state. The Court was dominated by proslavery Southerners, including Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, and so the court ruled in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*—the name of the case, the full name—that (let's go through a couple of the key provisions: slaves were property, not people, said the Court, and as such they had no right to sue; even free blacks were not citizens of the United States; and most radically, the Court ruled that the Missouri Compromise, which was passed back in 1820, was unconstitutional because Congress had no authority to make any laws curbing slavery. The Missouri Compromise, you probably know, was the law passed as I noted back in 1820 limiting the spread of slavery to territory below the latitude of 36° 30"; and this is an issue that we'll see in a coming lecture on the 14th Amendment that will be resolved by the 14th Amendment.

It's not until after the Civil War that the Supreme Court began to invoke judicial review on a more regular basis. In this period, these decisions reflected the Court's very conservative views on race and the economy. For

example, as we'll see in our coming lectures on the 14th Amendment and Reconstruction, many of these decisions involved striking down early civil rights laws or upholding state laws that legalized racial segregation. *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896—the decision upholding the constitutionality of a state law requiring separate but equal accommodations for blacks and whites—is a very good example of this trend. The Court in the late-19th century also employed judicial review to fend off attempts by state governments to limit the power of railroads and other large corporations. Just to cite one example: *Lochner v. New York*—this is the case from 1905—in this case, the Court struck down laws passed in New York State that set maximum hours for workers; and in this turn of the century period, the Court would strike down hundreds of similar kinds of state laws that limited the power of business.

But beginning in the 1930s, the Supreme Court began to defer more and more to the will of Congress and state legislatures. It invoked the power to strike down laws far less frequently and instead upheld most laws regulating business, workers' rights, and private property rights. From the 1950s into the 1990s, a more liberal Supreme Court turned to using judicial review to strike down laws that violated constitutional guarantees to individual rights and personal freedoms; things such as the freedom of expression, freedom of religion, or equal protection of the laws for women and for minorities. Just to cite one famous example: In 1967, in the case *Loving v. Virginia*, the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional state laws prohibiting interracial marriage. The Court in this period also began to employ judicial review to establish the existence of new and implicit rights in the Constitution. The most notable of these is the Right to Privacy. This idea was established in the landmark *Roe v. Wade* case of 1973. That's the case that struck down state laws prohibiting abortion because they violated a woman's right to privacy. Since the 1990s, the ideological composition of the Court has grown more and more conservative and its use of judicial review has tended to strike down laws limiting private property rights, the rights of corporations, and the rights of individuals to own guns.

So I think you'll agree that this establishment of judicial review that began in the case of *Marbury v. Madison* way back in 1803 has had a profound impact on American history. In fact, we should note that its impact has been felt far beyond the borders of the United States. Many scholars of constitutional

law argue that of the many contributions the US Constitution has made to modern notions of constitutional government throughout the world, judicial review is the most significant contribution. Since World War II, many countries such as Germany, France, Japan, Australia, India, and Italy—just to name a few—have adopted some form of judicial review, or what they tend to call “constitutional review.”

We’ll have to leave it there in this discussion of *Marbury v. Madison*. For our next lecture, we’ll explore a very different kind of turning point, this one involving technology and the beginning of the Transportation Revolution.

Thank you.

1807 On the Move—Transportation Revolution

Lecture 14

On August 14, 1807, Robert Fulton’s steamboat *The Clermont* launched a transportation revolution by proving that people, goods, and information could be moved as easily up a river as down. But this was only the first piece of a national transportation network that, in the words of Alexis de Tocqueville, “annihilated space and time” and fueled American expansion and economic development.

In 1810, a 57-mile stagecoach journey from Boston to rural Cape Cod took 12 hours. It cost more to move a barrel of wheat 30 miles over land from rural Pennsylvania to Philadelphia than to move it 3,000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean from Philadelphia to London. The success of industrialization, meanwhile, provided a huge incentive to increase the speed and bring down the cost of moving goods.

Steamboats represented the kind of technological leap that enabled the transportation revolution, tools that allowed humankind to defy and conquer nature. The steamboat turned rivers into two-way highways for the first time in history. Fulton’s Mississippi River steamboat operation touched off a boom in steamboat construction and led directly to the rise of the great river cities like St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Louisville, and Cincinnati, which led in turn to dramatic economic expansion. River steamboats were followed by transatlantic steamers, which not only expanded international commerce but helped boost immigration.

Canals are man-made rivers, built where we want them. Although people have been building canals for more than 2,000 years, the heyday of canal construction coincided with the rise of industry. In America, the canal phase began in 1817, with New York governor DeWitt Clinton’s backing of the Erie Canal between the Hudson River and Lake Erie. Its economic impact was astonishing: Travel time between New York City and Buffalo dropped from 20 days to 6, and the cost to ship cargo fell from \$100 to \$10 per ton. By 1840, 3,326 miles of canals had been built in the United States, much of it funded with public money.

Canals had many virtues, but they were slow and expensive to construct, plus limited by geography and climate. By contrast, railroads promised speedy construction and the ability to be built almost anywhere. By 1850, America had peaked at 3,700 miles of canals but had 9,000 miles of railroads and counting.

America's first commercial railroad was founded by Baltimore merchants. Construction began on July 4, 1828, and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad opened in 1830. But even before its completion, dozens more were under construction. By 1860, there were 30,000 miles of railroad in America backed by \$1 billion in investment, 30 percent of which was government money.

The transportation revolution was not only dramatic; it was fast. When Andrew Jackson arrived in Washington DC in 1829 for his first presidential



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-D44-17223.

In just over 30 years, America's railroad network went from a few miles of track to 30,000 miles and over \$1 billion in investment.

term, he traveled by horse. In 1837, at the end of the second, he left on a train.

Industrialization was propelled even faster by steamboats, canals, and railroads. They brought raw materials to manufacturers, such as Southern cotton to New England mills and Minnesota iron ore to Pittsburgh factories. They also brought finished goods to an ever-expanding consumer market.

By 1850, America had peaked at 3,700 miles of canals but had 9,000 miles of railroads and counting.

Prices for consumer goods fell; consumer choice expanded. The railroads became the first large corporations and developed modern business practices.

Government support for canals and railroads became a hotly contested political issue in antebellum

America. It shaped the ideology of the two main parties: the Whigs (and later the Republicans) who generally supported government financing of canals and railroads, and the Democrats, who generally opposed it. The latter at first feared empowering the federal government, then later came to fear the power of big business.

It's no coincidence that this same era saw rapid urban expansion, with New York City's population doubling every 15 years. The transportation revolution included urban transportation; steam ferries, horse cars, commuter railroads, trolleys, cable cars, and subways led to an explosion in the size of American cities.

On the downside, the railroad also assisted the spread of disease. Also, the further the railroad spread westward, the more white Americans and Europeans poured west, displacing, sometimes violently, the Native Americans. ■

Suggested Reading

Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*.

Sellers, *The Market Revolution*.

Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860*.

Questions to Consider

1. What significant social impacts did the transportation revolution have on American society beyond the rapid movement of goods and people?
2. What made the railroad emerge as the most important form of transportation technology?

1807 On the Move—Transportation Revolution

Lecture 14—Transcript

Hello and welcome back. Today, we examine a series of developments that historians refer to as “the Transportation Revolution.” Let’s begin by heading back to New York in 1807.

On August 14, 1807, a steamboat built by a man named Robert Fulton began a much-anticipated journey up the Hudson River to Albany, New York. His steamboat, *The Clermont*, carried several dozen passengers and it made the 150-mile journey in about 32 hours. Other inventors and entrepreneurs in Europe and in America had been fiddling with steamboat prototypes to this point, but Fulton’s became the first successful and enduring commercial steamboat operation in American history. He quickly established a thriving steamboat business on the Hudson River. Fulton’s remarkable feat not only earned him fame and wealth, but it also announced the beginning of the Transportation Revolution, a time in the early 19th century when many Americans set about applying technology to overcome natural obstacles that had limited movement of people and goods since the dawn of civilization.

Today, we’ll take an in-depth look at this turning point in antebellum America known as the Transportation Revolution; and in so doing, we’ll focus on three main points: First, we’ll look at the primitive nature of transportation before 1807. Then, we’ll move on to look at the key technological innovations of that period that followed: steamboats, canals, and railroads. Finally, we’ll look at the wide-ranging impacts of these new modes of transportation on all aspects of American society.

First, let’s look at the primitive state of transportation in the early republic. Let’s start with one example, and this one involves the movement of people to give you an idea of how difficult it was to get around. In 1810, a Massachusetts stagecoach company took out an ad in a local newspaper, and it announced with great pride that they were going to be running service from Boston to a town out on Cape Cod, about 57 miles away. They noted in the ad that this trip would take 12 hours and cost essentially \$50 in today’s money. One thing the ad didn’t mention was that the trip was not only going to be incredibly slow (12 hours to go 57 miles) and expensive (\$50 in our

money), but also undoubtedly extremely uncomfortable; it was going to be essentially a bone-rattling journey over rutted roads in a vehicle without shock absorbers.

Let's consider a second example, this time involving the movement of goods. In 1810, it cost more to move a barrel of wheat or corn 30 miles overland from rural Pennsylvania to Philadelphia than to ship that same barrel 3,000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean from Philadelphia to London. Let's just say that one more time: It cost more to send a single barrel of wheat or corn 30 miles overland from rural Pennsylvania to Philadelphia than to ship that same barrel 3,000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean to London. This fact explains many things, but it also explains a moment in history that happened just a few years before the time that we're talking about: the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794. What does the Whiskey Rebellion have to do with transportation? Just listen for a moment.

The high cost of moving grain overland that we just described to port cities led many farmers in the American interior to convert their grain into whiskey. Now, they drank a lot of this whiskey—if you look at the stats, it's clear that Americans drank a (literally) staggering amount of hard liquor in this period—but they also took some of this whiskey that they made and transported it to port cities for sale, earning them a vital source of hard currency. How did this work? They could take 100 pounds of grain and convert it into 10 gallons of whiskey; so that meant that when they were going to bring this to market, instead of lugging 100 pounds they could now take something considerably lighter (having converted it into whiskey, and it weighs a lot less), and when they got to the port city or the trading center they could fetch a much higher price for this 10 gallons of whiskey than they could for the raw material of grain. So when the federal government imposed an excise tax on whiskey in 1794, the farmers, quite understandably, revolted. Anyway, that's another story for another day; but it gives us a window into that difficulty of transportation and how it shaped American lives before the Transportation Revolution.

So I think we've established the idea that the transportation of goods and people in America before 1810 was slow, uncomfortable, and very expensive. Yet at this very moment, America was entering the industrial

age, building factories, establishing banks, and pushing settlement into the interior. This process of commercial expansion created an incredible incentive to find new and more efficient modes of transportation. But how? The first attempt to do this involved building roads, long roads. At the time of Fulton's steamboat demonstration in 1807, the federal government and many state governments were already busy building large roads across their states—they called these "turnpikes"—and they hoped that this would help connect commercial centers and boost commerce. But roads were nothing new—I mean, the Romans were building roads thousands of years ago—and they were expensive to build, they took a long time to build, and roads were subject to all the elements (rain, snow, and so forth) so they're not really a big advance in transportation.

So now I think we're ready at this point, having sketched out the background of poor transportation, to talk about the first big technological breakthrough: the steamboat. But before we go any further, we should pause for a moment to think about the key idea that lies behind the Transportation Revolution: defying and conquering nature. As Robert Fulton showed in 1807, it was possible to attach a steam engine to a boat and send it upriver. This is a remarkable thing; we can't take this for granted. For the first time in history, after Fulton does this, rivers become legitimate two-way highways of commerce. Up to that point, the Ohio, the Missouri, the Mississippi, and all the large rivers in America had provided basically a great way to send raw materials, agricultural commodities, from the interior downriver to port cities like New Orleans. But very few goods made their way back upriver, and this made for basically imbalanced trade; and this sharply curtailed economic development, until the introduction of the steamboat. Again, it was our friend Robert Fulton.

In 1811, Robert Fulton launched another steamboat, this time the *New Orleans*, on the Mississippi River; and it was so successful it touched off a steamboat building boom and the use of steamboats spread all across the great rivers of the American West. This rapid spread of the steamboat led directly to the rise of river cities—this is where we get St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Louisville, and Cincinnati—and this in turn spurred economic expansion because, as we know, cities serve as the gathering and distribution point for

commodities, and they also serve as centers for manufacturing. The example of Cincinnati explains how this takes place.

In 1810, Cincinnati had a tiny population of 2,500 people. Twenty years later, after the steamboat was introduced, the population had grown to 25,000. By that time, Cincinnati had its great nickname, “Porkopolis”—they don’t like to admit that now, but that’s what its nickname was originally—and that’s because it was the pork slaughtering and processing city of America, the capital of this process in America, due to its advantageous position on the Ohio River, which connected it via steamboats to the national economy. By the way, all that pig fat that was considered waste after the pigs were slaughtered inspired two immigrant entrepreneurs, one from Ireland and one from England, to establish a soap company. You may have heard of them: one was named Proctor and the other was named Gamble, and later they established what would become the largest soap and cleaning product company in the world.

Steamboat technology rapidly improved by the late 1830s, and by that point steamers were crossing the Atlantic on a regular basis and moving long distances up and down the American coast. This greatly expanded international commerce; it also boosted one of the most significant factors in American history, one that we’ve already talked about: immigration.

It’s time now to move on to our second big innovation: canals. While steamboats radically transformed river-based commerce, another trend was underway to build canals. Here we can see another example of the theme of defying and conquering nature. Rivers (brought to us by nature) are magnificent transportation systems, but they’re not always where you want them, and we already ascertained the fact that they’re also one-way. Canals, in contrast, are manmade rivers, and you can build them not everywhere, but you can build them pretty much where you want them. Canals actually have a long, long history. Early versions of canals—which were essentially just big trenches (they weren’t very technically sophisticated), usually connecting two large rivers or on a river going around a rough patch like a waterfall or a patch of rough water on a river—go back for thousands of years. The Babylonians, just to cite you one example, dug a canal connecting the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers about 2200 B.C., and people began to dig

canals ever thereafter. The Dutch in Europe appear to be the first to build canals with locks, and that allowed you to connect bodies of water that were not the same height. If you want to think of it this way: Locks allow you to go on water uphill (if you want to think of it in that manner). But even as canal building spread across Europe in the medieval period, canals were still pretty rare; they were expensive to make and the technology was still pretty primitive.

The heyday of canal construction coincided with the rise of industry, and it starts first in Great Britain. Great Britain built 100 canals between 1760 and 1820. In America, which is always a little bit behind Great Britain when it comes to the Industrial Revolution, their canal phase began in 1817. The visionary behind the canal was a man named DeWitt Clinton. De Witt Clinton was the governor of New York, and he convinced the state of New York to charter and partially fund what became the Erie Canal. It was an audacious proposal: a 363-mile canal across Upstate New York connecting the Hudson River to the Great Lakes (Lake Erie, to be precise). When people heard this, they laughed. They thought this was just the height of absurdity; 363 miles would cost millions of dollars and who knows if it would ever be completed, and who knows if it would work, if anybody would want to move cargo on this canal.

Clinton was undaunted, and he became the best pitchman for this idea, better than anybody he could have expected. He was an enthusiast, and he had a great way of kind of conveying his enthusiasm to skeptics. Let me just read to you one of his speeches in which he predicted the great things that the Erie Canal would bring if New York would rise to the occasion and build it: “As an organ of communication between the Hudson, the Mississippi, the St. Lawrence, the Great Lakes of the North and West, and their tributary rivers, [the Erie Canal] will create the greatest inland trade ever witnessed.” And he goes on in this same speech: and “[New York City] will in the course of time become the granary of the world, the emporium of commerce, the seat of manufactures, the focus of the great moneyed operations.” These are audacious claims; but in just a few years after the canal was completed, they turn out all to be true. We’re getting ahead of ourselves; let’s talk about the construction of the canal.

The construction for the Erie Canal began in 1817, and it was a monumental feat of engineering. No canal of this size had been built before, certainly in North America, and they had to in some ways make it up as they went along. Think about these numbers: It's 363 miles long. It has to go up 500 feet of elevation, which means you need 77 locks to allow for that differential in water height between the Hudson and Lake Erie, and also you had to build 18 aqueducts. All of this was done largely with human labor, including a large number of Irish immigrants. There's no power equipment in these days, so it all has to be dug with pickaxes and shovels, and maybe a little bit of ox, mule, and horse power as well, but not much. That's an amazing thing, and some people consider the Erie Canal to be the greatest engineering enterprise undertaken in America until the interstate highway system in the 1950s; it's that big. At the time—in 1817–1818 when they started it, or when they finished it in 1825—some people focused on a different number, they focused on the cost: \$7 million. Sounds like a drop in the bucket to us, but at the time it was just an unthinkable large amount of money. People couldn't imagine that anybody—any state government and any private investors—would find that money and dare to invest it in such a risky venture.

The Erie Canal was completed in 1825, and New Yorkers staged a great celebration. This was the first of many great celebrations that they would have in the 19th century: They would later have some to welcome the transatlantic cable that went across, connecting Europe to America by telegraph; also the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge; and then the Statue of Liberty. This was the big one in the early 19th century, and it was called “The Wedding of the Waters” (it's a great name). Basically what it was: DeWitt Clinton and a bunch of dignitaries got on a boat in Lake Erie, and then they filled up a keg of Lake Erie water. They then proceeded through the locks, all the way along the canal, and all the way there were speeches, bands playing, fireworks, and all kinds of celebrations because the people along the canal knew that they were going to be experiencing tremendous economic growth because of this canal. Finally, this celebration made its way down to New York harbor where the big celebration took place. Hundreds of thousands of people were there, more speeches, more music, and a gigantic fireworks display; but the key moment—the really signature moment of this celebration—was when De Witt Clinton, on this boat, went up to the bow and dumped that keg of Lake Erie water into New York Harbor, and that's why they called it the “Wedding

of the Waters.” Think about that concept earlier we mentioned, defying nature. It’s not natural that freshwater from Lake Erie is going to reach the saltwater of New York Harbor, but that’s what they did via technology.

So now the canal’s completed, we’ve had the big party; what’s the economic impact? How did it work out? There’s no other way to describe it: The economic impact of the Erie Canal was simply astonishing; I think it even surprised its most enthusiastic backers like De Witt Clinton. Just consider travel time: Travel time between New York City and Buffalo, which is the city at the end of the canal, was reduced from 20 days to 6. The cost of that transportation per ton went from \$100 a ton before the canal down to \$15 a ton. Just think about this: In business, almost everything essentially boils down to time and money; and here you have reduced the time of travel from 20 days to 6, and the cost of that transportation from \$100 a ton to \$15 a ton. This is an astronomical savings in both categories.

What happens? People begin to realize the incredible benefits of moving their cargo along the Erie Canal; so in 1825, 281,000 tons of goods moved across the canal; in 1860, 4 million tons. Of course, the state of New York was collecting tolls on this canal, so the state of New York was quickly able to retire the debt that they incurred in building the canal and had begun to make tons of money. The Erie Canal touched off a national canal-building craze; everybody wanted in. The canal-building craze; how much of one? By 1840—this is just 15 years after the Erie Canal was completed—the nation now had 3,300 miles of canals and counting. Some of the biggest of these canals included the Illinois and Michigan Canal that connected the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River, and Pennsylvania’s Main Line Canal that connected Philadelphia with Pittsburgh. Who paid for all this? That’s a really important question, especially in this time period, because it reminds us that as much as Americans revere the idea of a free market economy, we’ve never really had an entirely free market economy. The government has long played a key role in American economic development; far more so than we’d like to admit. More than half the money invested in the transportation projects between 1815 and 1860 came from government sources.

OK, now let’s turn to the third key innovation of the Transportation Revolution: the railroad. This is the big one. The canals that we’ve just

talked about had many virtues, but there were some problems associated with canals: They were slow and expensive to construct. They were limited by geography to certain places with available water; so when American settlement finally got out to the Great Plains, they're not going to be able to build canals there because there's no water, or not enough of it. Canals also froze in the winter, and during times of drought the water level dropped too low for boats to move on the canal. As wondrous as the canals were, they weren't perfect. By contrast, the railroad promised so much more. You could build them very quickly. You could build them almost anywhere, and that was really true once bridge and tunneling techniques were perfected. Railroads were not impeded by winter; even in the great Sierra Nevada Mountains when they'd get 20 feet of snow, they figured out ways to make the trains run. Once you got your railroad constructed, goods moved at a really fast pace, much, much faster than any other mode, including canals.

Canals, in a word, were sort of like the eight-track tapes of their day: a short-lived, transitional technology. If you're old enough to remember eight-track tapes, they were a big deal in the 1970s because for 50–60 years, if Americans wanted to listen to music they had to listen to a long-playing album (an LP), and you could only listen in a home. The eight-track, a rectangular thing that you punched into a machine in your house or—this is the big one—in your car, and then eventually at the beach with a portable unit, was a big deal. But it only lasted a few years because it was kind of clunky and had certain limitations, and it was quickly surpassed by the cassette tape, which was then surpassed by the CD, and now digital downloads. It serves a key purpose in freeing us from a long-standing technology.

By 1850, the canal era (it's only 25 years old) was now over essentially. America had built 3,700 miles of canals, but by 1850 railroad mileage was up to 9,000 miles and counting, very quickly. Where did the railroad come from? The earliest railroads originated (pretty much as always) in Europe. As early as the 1550s, Germans had developed what they called "wagonways." These were a system of wagons pulled along wooden rails by horses, usually over fairly short distances, to move cargo. Wagonways eventually were copied throughout Europe, and eventually evolved into what were called "tramways." By the 18th century, tramways were running on iron rails with notched wheels, very similar to train technology; and not

surprisingly, industry led the way in developing these tramways to move things like coal and iron. The big breakthrough, of course, was the addition of a steam engine.

In 1804, the first steam-powered locomotive pulled 10 tons of iron a distance of nine miles in Great Britain. That was the birth of the railroad, and it wasn't long before that technology crossed the Atlantic. In America, the first commercial railroad started in Baltimore, and it started in the late 1820s. In 1827, Baltimore merchants were watching these canals being dug everywhere and were really worried about Baltimore slipping in terms of its ranking as a port city, especially when compared to New York and Pennsylvania. They applied to the Maryland State Legislature for a charter to build what became the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Construction on what we call the B&O Railroad began on July 4, 1828—and that was no mistake, they wanted to give this a certain extra oomph by starting it on such an important date—and it was completed, the first part of it, by 1830, with great fanfare. There's a great story associated with this: Almost immediately after it was completed, there were many skeptics who thought the railroad was just an absurdity; and so somebody challenged a steam locomotive to a race between a railcar pulled by a horse. They had two parallel tracks, and they lined up the steam locomotive with a car full of people and another car full of people pulled by a horse, and they took off. Very quickly, the steam locomotive got way out ahead of the horse, but it blew a belt and had to slow down, and eventually the horse passed it. But even though technically the horse won the race, people looked and saw if it wasn't for that broken belt, the locomotive was obviously the vastly superior technology.

The railroad boom was on; and by 1840—this is just 10 years later—America had surpassed Great Britain in railroad mileage with a total of 3,000 miles. Now, not everybody was enamored of the railroad; we already saw a little indication of this with that challenge by the horse. One Boston editor, when he heard that Massachusetts was going to build a railroad from Boston to Albany, described it as “as useless as a railroad to the moon.” An Ohio school board declared the railroad “a device of Satan to lead immortal souls down to hell.” I guess he objected to all that smoke and fire. Many cities banned locomotives from entering the heavily populated areas, the downtown regions, because of the smoke, the noise—especially the noise

that would scare horses, the primary way to get around—and every now and again one of these locomotives would explode, and when a steam boiler explodes in a downtown area it's a horrible sight. New York City, for example, actually required trains that were coming into the city in the 1830s and 1840s to unhook the locomotive and hook up a team of horses and pull the train into the downtown area by horse power along the rails. By 1850, the railroad continued to boom. We're up to 9,000 miles in 1850, and this represented a \$300 million investment on the part of governments and of private investors. Ten years later, the total mileage was 30,000 miles, about \$1 billion of investment. As with canals, state investment, as we just mentioned, was very important; about a third of railroad capital before 1860 came from state investment.

So what was the impact of all of these innovations in transportation? The introduction of the steamboat, the canal, and the railroad dramatically reshaped American society, and its impact was felt pretty much everywhere and noticed by pretty much everyone. The French visitor Alexis de Tocqueville noted the impact; de Tocqueville is the Frenchman who comes to America in the 1830s and writes a famous book, which he publishes in 1835, called *Democracy in America*. Let's listen to what he had to say about this society that was just (it seemed to him) being so obsessed with technology and so successful with it. The first thing he's going to talk about is how Americans are using technology basically to tame nature:

The wide air and deep waters, the tall mountains, the outstretched plains and the earth's deep caverns, are become parcel of his [man's] domain and yield freely of their treasures to his researches and toils. The terrible ocean ... conveys ... [him] submissively. ... [And here's my favorite line; think about this.] He has almost annihilated space and time ['almost annihilated space and time,' that's what it's all about]. He yokes TO his car fire and water [that's the locomotive], those unappeasable foes, and flying from place to place with the speed of thought carries with him, in one mass, commodities for supplying a province.

Obviously, de Tocqueville is pretty amazed by what he's seen.

What's really remarkable about the Transportation Revolution is how fast all of these things happened; and the experience of Andrew Jackson, President Jackson, provides a telling example of just how quickly. Jackson arrived in Washington, DC in 1829 to be inaugurated President; and when he did so, he did like all the other presidents before him: he rode on a horse. Eight years later, when his two terms were up in 1837, he left Washington and the presidency on a train, in just the span of eight short years.

How did the Transportation Revolution change America? Let's look at a series of ways in which it changed America. First, let's look at the economic impact: Industrialization was propelled forward by steamboats, canals, and railroads. They brought the raw materials to manufacturers: Think about all that Southern cotton grown in the pre-Civil War period; it had to get to New England where the manufacturers were, so the trains and steam boats would become instrumental in that. Later, how did you get Minnesota iron ore to Pittsburgh to make steel? Trains, steam boats, and other forms of transportation. Steam boats and canals provided the raw materials to industry; they also provided industry with a way to distribute those finished goods to an ever-expanding consumer market. This led to the availability of lots of goods to Americans, and also it allowed for the prices to fall; so all kinds of things were now affordable, and the range of the choices was greatly expanded to the American consumer.

Another economic impact that railroads had was that they were the first large corporations in the United States, they're really the first "big businesses." They had to be, out of necessity; and so railroad executives had to do it because they covered such vast territories and stretched over many, many state lines. They involved millions of dollars of capital investment; they were usually publically held, so they had stockholders; they were subject to all kinds of regulations; they had huge labor forces; so of necessity, railroad executives had to, if they're going to be successful, develop what we would consider to be the essential basics of modern business practices. We can see this in the example of Andrew Carnegie.

As you probably know, Andrew Carnegie came to America as a 13-year-old immigrant from Scotland, and one of his first jobs was working in a telegraph office. He met Tom Scott, the president of the largest railroad in America,

the Pennsylvania Railroad, and he (Scott) hired Carnegie to work as his secretary. Through this, Carnegie learned everything you could possibly learn about running a large national corporation. Carnegie eventually left the railroad business to go into the manufacturing of steel, and he would always admit he knew very little about manufacturing steel. He knew, though, as a brilliant businessman, how to run a large corporation and how to hire expert talent and so forth. By 1900, Carnegie was the world's number one manufacturer of steel, and he was one of the richest men in America.

A second big impact is cultural. Even in the colonial era, many people considered Americans the most mobile people in the world; and what the Transportation Revolution would do was accelerate this trend. European visitors always commented on how much Americans moved; now they're going to comment on it even more. Americans began to move at a rapid pace; they're considered nomads in some people's eyes. In fact, Americans still to this day are among the most mobile people on the earth.

Let's look at a third consequence, one that people didn't want. This is an unintended consequence, which always attends the introduction of new technology: the spread of disease. Because people moved so much more now with the Transportation Revolution, disease moved with them; and we see a sharp decline in life expectancy in the first half of the 19th century. In 1815, an average white male would live about 52 years; in 1845, life expectancy had dropped to 47 years. That's going to rise over the second half of the 19th century and into the 20th century, but the initial impact is the spread of disease and the lowering of life expectancy.

A fourth impact was political. Government support for canals and railroads became a hotly contested political issue in antebellum America, and this issue shaped the ideology of the two main parties. The Whig Party—much of them later became part of the Republican Party—generally supported government financing of canals and railroads. The Democratic Party generally opposed government financing of canals and railroads. They disliked policies that would create ties between government and business interests. Southern Democrats in particular had another concern that they were leery about; they, in fact, would say this in so many words: If a government could make canals, it also had the power to abolish slavery, and they wanted nothing to do with

that. The Transportation Revolution also shaped the politics of the late 19th century. Railroads were at the center of the debates in the Gilded Age about the power of big business and the role of the government in regulating the economy.

A fifth impact of the Transportation Revolution is on American cities. It's no coincidence that this was the same era of rapid urban expansion. New York City's population doubled every 15 years; and that's pretty much the story of all of our big cities. How was this possible? Immigration, of course, played a big role, and so, too, did migration of Americans from the countryside to the cities; but the real big impact was the Transportation Revolution, and this happened in two important ways: One was that cities simply began to use this technology; so steam ferries began to move people back and forth from cities, as do commuter railroads, allowing urban residents to live further and further away from their place of work. Then cities began to adapt these technologies to urban conditions; so they build railroads that look like railroads except they were not pulled by locomotives, they were pulled by horses. Cities also developed trolleys, cable cars, and eventually subways; technologies specifically fitted for an urban environment. This urban Transportation Revolution led to an explosion in the size of American cities; and the reason is very simple: They provided cheap and fast transportation, meaning that you could now live further and further away from the business core where most people worked.

A sixth impact of the Transportation Revolution is that it promoted new forms of leisure. Over time, entrepreneurs—in some cases, steamboat, streetcar, and railroad companies themselves—built huge amusement parks, often at the end of their train runs. They made money transporting people to these venues, they made money on what people spent there, and then they made money on taking these people home (pretty good deal). The most famous of these amusement parks were places like Coney Island in New York and Chutes Park in Chicago, but there were hundreds, perhaps thousands, more of them across the country. This same arrangement played a key role in the development of professional baseball. Where do you think those early baseball stadiums were built? At the end of train lines. Who do you think financed most of them? That's right, transportation companies. The advent of steamboats, streetcars, and railroads also led Americans to start taking day

trips to beaches, to parks, mountains, and recreational areas; and over time, these day trips were extended to a week or more, becoming what we call a “vacation.” In short, an entire leisure culture and vacation industry grew out of the Transportation Revolution.

A seventh impact of the Transportation Revolution is that it sped the demise of Native Americans. Simply put: The further the threads of the railroad web as it spread out westward, the more white Americans and European immigrants poured into the trans-Mississippi West; and the more white settlers that entered the west, the more people there clamored for Washington to send the military to remove the Indians from the land.

It looks like we’re almost out of time. In our next lecture, we’ll look at the transformation of American democracy that was triggered by the elimination of property requirements and other restrictions on voting.

Thank you.

1816 One Man, One Vote—Expanding Suffrage

Lecture 15

Voting in the early republic was limited to men who owned property, the theory being that citizens who voted ought to be independent and not beholden to their employers or landlords. Over time, popular demands to reduce or abolish property requirements gained momentum. In 1816, when the new western state of Indiana abolished all restrictions on voting by white male citizens, it sparked similar moves by other states, ushering in a new era of popular politics that forever changed the character of American democracy.

Before the Revolution, voting laws varied from colony to colony, but about 60 percent of white men had the right to vote. In most places, men had to own real property to be eligible to vote; it was felt that owners of property had more of a stake in society, whereas the poor were dependent on their employers or landlords, who might compel them to vote a certain way. These beliefs explain in part why the word “democracy” was practically synonymous with “mob rule” in the 18th century. In most but not all colonies, the vote was also restricted by race, gender, and religious affiliation.

In the 1780s and 1790s, several states redefined their voting rights by making the payment of taxes, rather than the ownership of land, the basis. Others opened up voting to men who served in the militia or army. Most eliminated religious tests, and Massachusetts, New York, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and North Carolina allowed free African American men to vote.

Historians cite three main trends in the antebellum period that advanced the idea of universal suffrage: westward expansion, the rise of political parties, and the popularization of democratic ideals. Timing also played a role.

Westward expansion led to the creation of new states, whose leaders needed settlers to thrive. The states’ leaders, therefore, offered broader voting rights to attract settlers; Indiana was the first of these, in 1816. Eastern states therefore broadened their own laws to retain citizens. By 1828, the

year Andrew Jackson was elected president, most states had universal white male suffrage.

Party rivalry also contributed broader to voting rights. The Democratic Party had long identified itself with the interests of the common man, so its leaders saw a political advantage in opening up the vote to as many men as possible. The Whigs, judiciously, chose not to oppose this position.

Note that the movement to drop property and tax payment requirements gained popularity before industrialization and mass immigration. Its proponents did not foresee the emergence of millions of working-class wage earners living in cities, nor the massive wave of immigration in the 1830s. Had these trends been well underway before the 1820s, it seems far less likely that the proponents of universal white male suffrage would have succeeded so completely by the 1830s.

As more white men were being given voting rights, black men throughout the Union were losing them. By the eve of the Civil War, only five states allowed blacks to vote—all of them New England states with tiny African American populations.

With the rise of mass politics, politicians had to gain the loyalty and votes of huge numbers of people spread across great distances. They took advantage of new communications technologies like the telegraph and the steam-driven printing press; staged rallies, parades, and barbeques offering free food and alcohol; and developed catchy slogans.



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-100971.

One irony of the movement toward universal white male suffrage is that free black men lost voting rights in all but a few states.

Before 1830, secret ballots were denounced as dangerous and undemocratic, and almost all voting was public, by voice or by raising hands. But between 1830 and 1850, partisan politics combined with public ballots led to violence. Hired men called “shoulder hitters” physically or verbally intimidated voters. This sometimes erupted into riots. By the end of the 19th century, this convinced Americans of the need for a secret ballot.

Most Americans are not aware of how corrupt elections were in the 19th century.

Most Americans are not aware of how corrupt elections were in the 19th century. It was nearly impossible to keep track of who voted, so men could and did vote

more than once. Others were paid to vote in more than one location. And in some places, elections were determined not by who garnered the most votes but by who controlled the counting process. Still, voter turnout remained above 70 percent for the whole century. Over time, elections became cleaner, safer, and more peaceful.

Several states tried to reimpose property and tax payment restrictions on voting in the 1870s, out of fear of the working class. These efforts largely failed. Women began agitating for voting rights, which they achieved in 1920. While black men had legally won the right to vote in the 1860s, there were serious, often violent obstacles to their rights until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Ironically, just as universal adult suffrage was finally achieved, voter participation declined, hitting an all-time recorded low of 49 percent in 1996, the lowest voting rate of any people living in a Western democracy. ■

Suggested Reading

Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*.

Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*.

Questions to Consider

1. Is there any merit to the argument that only property owners or tax payers, those with a “stake” in society, should be allowed to vote?
2. Why is it important to recognize that while voting rights expanded for some Americans, they were taken away from others?

1816 One Man, One Vote—Expanding Suffrage

Lecture 15—Transcript

Welcome back. It's time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Today, we look at the story of how Americans in the early 19th century dramatically expanded the definition of American democracy by dropping most of the restrictions on voting for white men.

Let's start with a story that I think highlights one of the central themes of this lecture. It's 1841, and over the past 20 years one by one each state in the Union has eliminated property restrictions for voting, except Rhode Island. That little state still operated under the rules of a royal charter granted way back in 1663; that's the charter that Roger Williams secured to protect religious liberty. Those rules rendered the political system in Rhode Island highly undemocratic. For example, representation in the state legislature was apportioned in such a way that left large industrial cities with hardly any representation at all; and voting was restricted to property owners and their eldest sons. In 1841, a man named Thomas W. Dorr led a revolt against this system. He organized an extralegal convention to draft a new state constitution that would, among other things, equalize representation and eliminate all restrictions on voting. The governor of the state of Rhode Island declared Dorr and his fellow reformers outlaws and he called out the state militia to arrest them. Dorr and his supporters then armed themselves and tried to seize the state arsenal in the capital at Providence, Rhode Island.

Dorr's Rebellion was quickly suppressed and Dorr was arrested, and he was convicted of high treason and given a life sentence in prison. But the following year, the governor pardoned Dorr and called a state constitutional convention; and the resulting document that this convention produced opened up voting for all tax-paying native-born men. Dorr's Rebellion is worth noting for a number of reasons, but most importantly for the way it stood in sharp contrast to the story of how voting rights were extended to the great majority of white men in the rest of the republic. Everywhere outside of Rhode Island, white men gained the right to vote with almost no struggle at all; and that's pretty remarkable when we remind ourselves how radical and exceptional the idea of popular democracy was in the world in the early

19th century. How did this happen? How did Americans come to embrace universal suffrage in this period?

Before we go any further into this incredible story, let's set out some objectives for this lecture. Basically, we'll focus on four things: First, we'll look at the status of voting in the era of the American Revolution. Second, we'll examine the several trends in the early 19th century that led to this dramatic expansion of voting, at least for white men (and then, of course, other groups over time). Third, we'll explore the many ways in which universal white male suffrage changed American life. Then finally, we'll basically look at the "rest of the story," as they say, to see how voting rights expanded and contracted in the 19th and early 20th century.

OK, let's start by looking at the status of voting in the era of the American Revolution. Who could vote in 1776? On the eve of the American Revolution, about 60 percent of white men in America could vote. This number was somewhat higher in more recently settled areas (about 70–80 percent) and lower in older towns in the east, along the east coast (more like 40–50 percent). That's a far cry from "universal suffrage," but it's a lot higher actually than the voting rights that were extended in England. What determined a person's eligibility for voting in this period? Let's just pick a year: 1776. There were a number of factors, but it's very important to note that the rules varied widely from colony to colony. First and foremost, the most important rule was property ownership. Seven colonies required ownership of a minimum acreage or value of real property. Six colonies required real property or personal property of a certain value or payment of a certain level of taxes; all of these things to indicate that you had some substance, some wealth.

Why property? Why was this important? It made perfect sense in the 18th century republican mind to require property. For one, property owners had what they called a "stake" in society; they had a vested interest in a stable and wise government, especially when it came to decisions on taxes. The poor and the landless had no such stake; and, in fact, their poverty had the potential to tempt poor people to vote for radicals who might enact laws that would take property from those who had it and give it to those who did not. Or they might be easily duped by power-hungry elites who wished to

make themselves into a permanent aristocracy. As Gouverneur Morris, one of the key Founding Fathers, put it: “Give the votes to people who have no property, and they will sell them to the rich”; so there’s concern about landless people voting.

In addition, property ownership, they believed, made a man independent. He who owned property was beholden to no one and therefore he was immune to manipulation or intimidation by powerful people who might want them to vote a particular way. In contrast, the poor by definition were dependent; their employers or their masters might compel them to vote a certain way. Basically, people said, it’s better to keep these folks out of the political process, lest the process become corrupted. This understanding of voting explains in part why the word “democracy”—a word that we revere as a fundamental American value—was a negative, fearful term in the 18th century. It meant rule by “the people,” and that was the problem. People used the term “democracy” interchangeably with the word “mob.” “The people” were understood to be passionate, irrational, and not particularly intelligent. As Elbridge Gerry, who was a famous and wealthy Massachusetts leader, famously put it, “Democracy ... [is] the worst ... of all political evils.”

A second restriction on voting found in most of the colonies was residency. To prevent voting by “stakeless” transients—people just sort of passing through—most colonies required a minimum number of months or years’ residence before one was eligible to vote. A third restriction on voting was religion. In the 18th century, five colonies barred Catholics from voting; four colonies barred Jews from voting. A fourth factor in determining who could vote was, of course, gender. A number of colonies explicitly restricted voting to men; and in the rest, only a handful of women—usually property-owning widows—were permitted to vote. But as I noted at the start, there were no rules here; voting rights and voting laws varied colony to colony. As a consequence, some colonies not only allowed a few women to vote, but also free African Americans, Indians, and non-naturalized aliens were allowed to vote, and many colonies also allowed Catholics and Jews to vote.

The first great change in the legal definition of voting, one that indicated a movement towards universal suffrage, came during and after the Revolution as states drew up their constitutions. The seeds of this trend had actually

been planted in the years leading up to the Revolution. If you recall some of our lectures from that period—the Boston Tea Party, in particular—you’ll remember that one of the central points of contention between the colonies and Great Britain was over the true nature of political representation. Leaders in Britain argued that the colonies enjoyed adequate representation—a virtual representation—by members of Parliament. The colonists, as you’ll remember, rejected this idea of virtual representation and instead insisted that authentic government must derive its legitimacy from the consent of the governed; that is, from the direct representation by leaders chosen by the people. As one resident of Lenox, Massachusetts put it in 1778: “How can a Man be said to [be] free and independent . . . when he has not a voice allowed him [in elections?]” Good question. After 1776, the citizens of the United States began to put this notion into practice, albeit slowly and imperfectly. In the 1780s and the 1790s, for example, several states redefined their requirements for voting rights by making the payment of taxes rather than ownership of land the basis for voting rights. Other states opened up voting to men who had served in the militia or army, even if they didn’t own any property. Many states also eliminated—most states, in fact—religious tests for voting or office holding; and six states (Massachusetts, New York, Vermont, Pennsylvania), as well as Southern states (like Maryland and North Carolina) even allowed free African Americans to vote.

We can see significant steps towards our modern notions of democracy; but it’s really important to note here that the United States was not founded as a democracy. The Founding Fathers established the U.S. as a republic—as a representative republic—in which some, but not all, of the governed would have a say. The Constitution’s “We the people . . .” those famous opening words, referred to a small slice of the American population; basically propertied white men. It didn’t include poor whites, it didn’t include women, and it didn’t include African Americans; and the Constitution itself said nothing at all about voting rights for individuals. It left that issue up to the states; and so that is where we’ll see the big changes begin to occur.

What happened next? What happened next that led, in the early 19th century, to a dramatic expansion of voting? First, there was westward expansion. You might ask yourself: What could westward expansion possibly have to do with voting? The answer is: a lot. Westward expansion led to the creation of

new states; and the leaders of these states all agreed on one thing: Economic development and prosperity, not to mention representation in Congress, were dependent on population growth; and one way to attract new settlers to these new states was to guarantee them a right they did not enjoy in the eastern states, voting rights. This idea actually started in the east when Vermont became a state in 1791; they're the first state that, in their constitution that year, allowed universal white male suffrage. The next year Kentucky adopted a similar provision, allowing basically all white men to vote. But then at that point, 1792, the "movement" (such as it was) all but ground to a halt; so there's a bit of a gap between the 1790s and the early 19th century when the movement towards universal suffrage picks up again, and it picks up again the mid-18-teens.

Here's where we really see the turning point occurring. It started with Indiana. When Indiana became a state in 1816, it adopted universal white male suffrage; and then four states followed in quick succession: Illinois in 1818, Alabama in 1819, Maine in 1820, and Missouri in 1821. This trend toward universal suffrage in the West and in the South eventually caught the attention of political leaders in the older eastern states. That same year, 1821, believing that it necessary to prevent the loss of population to these newer states in the West, Massachusetts and New York—two very big, prominent, important states—adopted universal white male suffrage; so the trend now has bounced back to the east, and many, many more states would follow. By 1828, the year that Andrew Jackson was elected President, most states had dropped their property restrictions or tax payment requirements on voting.

A second factor in promoting universal suffrage was the rise of competitive political parties. The Democratic Party, the party of Jefferson and Jackson, had a long tradition of identifying itself with the interests of the common man. Not surprisingly, leaders of the Democratic Party began to see the political advantage in opening up the vote to as many adult men as possible. They made suffrage reform a political issue and they positioned the Democratic Party as the great advocate of empowering the common man with the vote; and therefore, the other side of that was that the Democratic Party was the enemy of elitism and aristocracy. The leaders of the Whig Party, they're the heirs of Federalists; and they're the party descended from John Adams and Alexander Hamilton. They tended to believe—their political philosophy—

was a little bit more towards the elitist side of things. They believed in a kind of elitist notion of politics and society that argued that voting should be restricted to property holders and office holding to an enlightened elite. But once the Democrats began to advocate universal white male suffrage, the Whigs basically chose not to oppose this trend; and this was just basically a wise political calculation on their part. They did not want to be put in a position of being identified as the party that opposed democracy and distrusted the common man. As a result, suffrage reform became in the 1820s and 1830s an issue with wide bipartisan support.

A third factor that led to the expansion of voting in this period was timing. Basically by “timing” I mean that the movement to drop property and tax payment requirements gained popularity before two major developments began to transform the nation: industrialization and mass immigration. Proponents of universal white male suffrage did not foresee the emergence of millions of working class wage earners living in crowded industrial cities; and they did not foresee the massive tidal wave of immigration that began to hit American shores in the 1830s. Had these trends been well underway before the 1820s, it seems far less likely that the proponents of universal white male suffrage would have succeeded so completely by the 1830s.

The cumulative impact of these three factors that led to this dramatic expansion of the vote moved the U.S. closer to becoming a democracy. Remember how I noted at the beginning of this lecture how narrowly the Founding Fathers understood the phrase “We the people.” The great spread of voting rights in the 1820s and 1830s constituted a radical redefinition of “We the people” from a small fraction of the population to something close to half the American people. Why did I say something only close to half? For one thing, women were excluded from voting, and nearly all African Americans were also excluded. In fact, at the very same time that all white men were achieving the right to vote, black men throughout the Union were losing that right.

In 1801, Maryland, in the same law that eliminated property requirements for voting for white men, explicitly denied blacks the right to vote. Ohio followed with a similar law in 1803; New Jersey in 1807; Louisiana in 1812; Indiana in 1816; Mississippi in 1817; Connecticut and Illinois in 1818;

Alabama in 1819; Missouri in 1821; and on and on it went. As white men got the vote, laws were passed explicitly taking the vote away from African Americans. On the eve of the Civil War, only five states allowed blacks to vote, all of them New England states with tiny African American populations. You might say that where class—which we might define as, in this case, property ownership—had once determined who could vote; by 1860, it was race and, of course, to a certain extent also gender that determined who could vote. Here we see a vital fact about the history of the vote in America: The right to vote did not increase steadily with each succeeding generation; there were periods of retrogression. While some Americans gained the right to vote in the antebellum period, other people lost it.

OK, let's hold that thought for a moment and turn our attention to how this great expansion of voting for white men changed American democracy. Let's consider just a couple of key areas: First of all, mass politics. The first significant change in American democracy in this period was the rise of something called "mass politics." Up until the 1820s, elections were small and often quiet affairs; and that's because the electorate was small and politicians in this period tended to be drawn from the respectable class of, say, merchants and professionals. The culture was they disdained the idea of campaigning; that just seemed bad manners essentially. They might give a speech or two, but that was it.

With the sudden expansion of the electorate, politicians and political parties suddenly found it necessary to gain the loyalty and the votes of huge numbers of people spread across great distances. So they did two things: First, they took advantage of the new communications technology that was just coming into use, like the telegraph and the steam-powered printing press; and they used this technology to generate mountains of printed matter—newspapers, pamphlets, song sheets, candidate biographies, and so on—to spread the word about a party or a candidate's position on key issues. We're going to talk a lot more about this in an upcoming lecture on the Communications Revolution. The second thing that took place in this period with the expansion of the vote was that political operatives developed ways of generating popular enthusiasm for a candidate or for a party; and they did this by staging huge rallies, great big parades (with fireworks, of course), and barbeques offering free food and alcohol. They also developed catchy

slogans; this became almost a rule of politicking at this point. Probably one of the most famous ones was “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too”; wouldn’t that make your blood stir? Election Day essentially became a party in this period, and voter turnout in the 19th century was enormous; many people make comparisons between the enthusiasms for voting and the enthusiasms we now see in modern times over professional sports teams.

Another key point in this transformation was the ballot. For most Americans, voting is synonymous with a ballot; but ballots—paper ballots—are actually of relatively recent origin, and they were made necessary by the great expansion of the electorate. Prior to this development, voting was done by raising one’s hand, or by voice (*vive voce*, as it was called). In some locales, voters dropped a pebble or a bean or a musket ball even into a basket to indicate their choice. In fact, the word “ballot” comes from the Italian word *ballotta*, which means “little ball.” But with the dawn of mass politics, *vive voce* voting became impractical (so did voting with beans and musket balls); so gradually states and municipalities opted for paper ballots. But even here there were important differences from modern times. Ballots were not supplied by the government but rather by political parties or individual candidates; and these ballots only included the names of the party’s candidates, not their opponents. To cast a ballot, a voter simply entered a polling site and handed over his preprinted ballot; sometimes he would cut it out of a newspaper or it would be handed to him on the sidewalk. You can see why even at this early stage in democracy it was important for political parties to be organized and to have money. They needed to print up thousands of ballots and then to make sure that they were distributed far and wide.

Another aspect of this form of voting is really important to note: it meant that voting was entirely public; there was no secret ballot in the 19th century. In the days of *vive voce*, you literally spoke your vote publicly. So when paper ballots became the norm, parties printed them on distinctly colored paper and voters submitted them in front of great crowds of onlookers, or they were placed in ballot box, and if you’ve ever seen a 19th-century ballot box it’s essentially a large glass bowl, so people could see what color ballot you dropped into it. My students are always surprised when I point out these odd relics, the old ballot boxes, in political cartoons. If you’ve seen the famous cartoon from Reconstruction called “First Vote” showing African Americans

casting their first vote, in front of them are a series of glass globes into which they're going to drop their vote. Or another one from the women's suffrage campaign called "The Lady Says I Can Handle Both." It shows a beautiful woman holding in one hand a cradle saying "I can handle motherhood" and in the other hand a strange-looking object. If you know what it is, it makes sense; it's a glass ballot box. If you didn't know what a ballot box looked like you wouldn't actually understand what that cartoon was saying; she's saying "I can balance the two, motherhood and political activism." This idea of voting in public was intentional. Voting was a public, transparent act; people understood that this was important. In a moment, you'll see why by the end of the 19th century most Americans came to a different conclusion: They argued that public voting was dangerous and undemocratic, and then at that point state after state switched to secret ballots, the kind of balloting we have today.

Another theme of this new era of expanded voting rights was violence. It was not uncommon for full-scale riots to break out at polling sites in the antebellum period. By one estimate, 89 Americans were killed at polling sites in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s. Some of this violence was attributable to the enthusiasm whipped up by the parties; we see this in modern times when crowds at large sporting events begin to riot. But in the 1830s and 1840s and 1850s, a great deal of this violence stemmed from the practice of public voting. The positive side of mass politics, of course, was that politicians and parties needed to compete furiously for votes in this growing electorate; getting out the vote became crucial to success.

The negative side of this new trend was that it also created an incentive to find ways to prevent citizens from casting their ballots. This was accomplished by hiring gangs of tough young men to surround each polling site, either physically to intimidate a citizen into voting for a particular candidate or voting a party line (because remember, everybody knows who you voted for). These men actually had a nickname, they're called "shoulder hitters." They'd encourage a citizen to vote for the "right" candidate by implying as this person sort of approached the polling site—they might even bump into them and say "You know who you're going to vote for, right?"—clearly indicating that if they voted the wrong way they would beat this man up on his way out of the polling site. They also might also see to it—more

than just inflict physical harm—that this man’s family members, if they’re on the public payroll (say one of them was a policeman or his sister was a teacher) that they would be fired in retribution. When “persuasion” failed, hired toughs could simply assault a would-be voter and drive him from the polls, not allowing him to vote at all; basically making him run for his life. Now you can see why at the end of the 19th century reformers successfully convinced Americans of the need for what was called “the Australian ballot”; that is, a ballot that was provided by the government and that a voter filled out in secrecy in a voting booth.

A fourth theme of this expanded suffrage was corruption. Americans in the 20th and 21st centuries had become accustomed to news reports of stolen and rigged elections occurring all around the world. Our government and leaders often criticize these elections and lend support to efforts to monitor subsequent elections to make sure that they are “free and fair.” But most Americans are not aware of just how corrupt our elections used to be in the 19th century. We’ve already discussed the role of violence in throwing elections, but there were many, many other options that were far more subtle. For one, it was nearly impossible to keep track of who voted. As a consequence, men could vote more than once. Like “shoulder hitters” there was a nickname for these men, too: They were called “repeaters”; and the most common trick was about a month or so before election day, a man would grow a full beard. In the morning, he would vote with a full beard; and then a few hours later he would come back with part of his beard shaved off to achieve a different look; then in mid-afternoon he’d shave off most of the beard and leave just a moustache; and then in the evening he’d shave it all off and vote clean-faced; so one man would be good for four votes. Of course, he voted each time under a different name, and these would be provided by the party. In other times, he voted for someone else, someone who recently died; that’s one of the more common ways of voting. This practice of essentially in the name of recently deceased people became very common in big cities, and Boston had a famous expression and it’s sort of winking at its corrupt politics saying, “the election is never over ’til all the votes are counted from St. Augustine’s Cemetery.”

Yet another form of election fraud was called “counting out”; a lot of great phrases from this period. An election in the 19th century was often

determined not by who garnered the most votes, but by who controlled the counting process. Here we see why political machines like Tammany Hall in New York were so powerful for so long. Once they gained political power, they filled key jobs like poll inspectors and local judges with party loyalists. These people oversaw the hiring also of policemen, who were often in charge of with monitoring the vote-counting process. If you've ever seen Thomas Nast's cartoons, there are many of them that show this. There's one that shows "Boss" Tweed, the famous leader of Tammany Hall, leaning up against a ballot box with the caption, "In counting there is strength," basically meaning, "It doesn't matter who votes, I'm going to win the election because my people are going to count it the right way." You get the point: Democracy was messy from the start. But it should be noted it was also marked by extraordinarily high levels of voter turnout. In 1840, voter turnout topped 80 percent of eligible voters, and it never dipped below 70 percent for the rest of the century. That is pretty impressive, no, especially compared to today?

It would take many decades to work out all the pitfalls and ugly practices associated with popular democracy; but over time elections became cleaner, safer, and more peaceful. Yet, the story of American democracy was not one of unbroken progress, with more and more people granted the right to vote. For one thing, as we'll see in coming lectures on the 14th Amendment and Reconstruction, African American men were granted the right to vote after the Civil War; but by 1900, most African Americans had seen their right to vote stripped away by violence and legal trickery. Several states, most notably New York, tried in the 1870s to reimpose property and tax payment restrictions on voting for all people, white working class people especially, out of fear that the growing American working class was becoming more and more radical, and in their words "too socialistic"; so they actually tried to take the vote back from white people in the 1870s. These efforts all failed, but it was clear that towards the end of the 19th century entering the 20th century America was actually becoming a less democratic society.

At that very moment, of course, as we'll see in an upcoming lecture on women's suffrage, American women were moving closer to achieving the right to vote. They finally succeeded in 1920, making the U.S. more democratic—so you can see fluctuation taking place here—but still far short of the ideal of all adult citizens exercising the right to vote. That moment

finally arrived in the mid-1960s during the Civil Rights movement with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The latter removed the last serious obstacles to universal suffrage rights in America. But at that very moment, American democracy faced a different crisis: declining voter participation. That trend had begun, ironically, at the end of the 19th century, just as a wide range of reforms took hold that made voting more honest and accurate. Even the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 in 1971 failed to arrest this trend of declining vote turnout. Voter turnout in presidential elections was 63 percent in 1960. It fell to 55 percent in 1972 to 49 percent in 1996. More recently, in 2008, it jumped back up to 64 percent; but whether that represents a trend or just maybe an exceptional blip remains to be seen. Even with this recent uptick in participation, as of 2010, Americans have the lowest voting rate of any people living in a Western democracy. As you can see, we still haven't figured this democracy thing out yet.

We'll have to leave it there in this discussion of the establishment of universal white male suffrage. For our next lecture, we'll explore the story of the second great awakening. Thank you.

1821 Reborn—The Second Great Awakening

Lecture 16

The sweeping religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening took off with the preaching of Charles G. Finney. Rejecting earlier fire-and-brimstone Calvinism, Finney and others captivated millions of Americans with a new, optimistic form of Protestantism. Many came to believe that society as a whole could be perfected and that it was the duty of all true Christians to work to this end. Thus the Second Great Awakening inspired most of the era's great reform movements, including abolition, temperance, public education, and women's rights.

At the age of 29, Charles Grandison Finney had a profound conversion experience and left his career as a lawyer to become a preacher. Finney later became the most influential figure in the Second Great Awakening, but he was not its originator.

Historians estimate that, although most Americans were nominally Christians in 1790, only about 1 in 10 belonged to any formal church or sect. The Enlightenment had promoted “rational” theologies—such as deism, Universalism, and Unitarianism—that accepted the existence of a creator and the value of Christian ethics but deemphasized the role of God in everyday life, as well as the divinity of Jesus. Under this way of thinking, most Christian dogma was irrelevant at best, dangerous superstition at worst.

Many early Americans were also unchurched because of the disestablishment of religion. Also, many Americans were moving westward circa 1800, which disconnected them from family networks and formal institutions like churches. This trend toward secularism was deeply upsetting to the many Americans who still believed in formal Christianity.

There had been an earlier round of evangelical fervor in America in the mid-1700s, called the First Great Awakening, but the one brewing around 1800 would exert a far greater influence. The message of the early Second Great Awakening varied by preacher and location, but there were three common ideas: True Christians must reject deism and rationalism, put God and Jesus

back into the center of their lives, and practice a fervent and active piety. The movement rejected predestination, which had been at the heart of Calvinism in Europe and Puritanism in America for centuries, teaching that each person could affect his or her own destiny by choosing to live a pious, faithful, moral, God-centered life. Both the positive message and the emotional, evangelical style of the movement had broad appeal.

The movement was most often spread by itinerant Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian preachers. A new tradition, the camp meeting, first occurred in the summer of 1801 at Camp Cane Ridge, Kentucky.

Finney rejected predestination and stressed free will. But he took this notion further with his doctrine of Perfectionism.

The Second Great Awakening represented a democratization of religion that was in step with the emerging democratic spirit of the nation. The movement also attracted many women, which not

only reflected democratization but the impact of the Industrial Revolution, which gave women more leisure time. It also attracted large numbers of African Americans, thanks to its message of empowerment and the freedom it offered to form independent congregations.

Charles G. Finney emerged as the key figure in the movement in the 1820s. He began his high-energy, emotional preaching along the Erie Canal, drawing thousands of participants to huge revivals that lasted weeks. Finney approached his preaching like the lawyer he had been; he spoke to the faithful like a jury he was determined to win over. Like the Evangelicals who preceded him, Finney rejected predestination and stressed free will. But he took this notion further with his doctrine of Perfectionism. Finney argued that true Christians had an obligation and the ability to strive for perfection. If they succeeded, they would bring on the millennium—the second coming of Jesus.

Perfectionism and millennialism meant more than cleaning up your own act; it compelled Christians to eliminate any form of sin around them that they could. Finney and the Second Great Awakening, in other words, played a central role in inspiring the many, many reform movements that characterized

the antebellum period: antislavery, temperance, antiprostitution, prison reform, and treatment of the mentally ill. These movements attracted many women and thus indirectly helped inspire the women's rights movement.

The temperance movement inspired by the millennialism took aim not at alcohol per se but at what it led to—infidelity, domestic violence, unemployment, and so on. But increasingly the emphasis was on prohibition. Evangelicals took advantage of new techniques in publishing to crank out mountains of temperance literature. Perfectionism began to cross over from a private moral crusade to a public one aimed at changing society. The values championed by the Second Great Awakening also happened to be the values of the new industrial order and the emerging middle class: order, clean living, discipline, thrift, hard work, and sobriety.

Whereas only 10 percent of Americans belonged to any formal church in 1790, some 75 percent belonged to one by 1840. The Methodist Church, which was a tiny sect in 1790, had become the largest denomination in the nation. In 1780, there were only 2,000 ministers in America; by 1845, the number had swelled to 40,000. ■

Suggested Reading

Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*.

Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*.

Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*.

Walters, *American Reformers, 1815–1860*.

Questions to Consider

1. What was it about the message of the Second Great Awakening that inspired so many social reform movements?
2. How does religion continue to shape American society in the 21st century?

1821 Reborn—The Second Great Awakening

Lecture 16—Transcript

Welcome back. It's time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Today we look at the religious revival movement in the early national period known as the Second Great Awakening.

Let's start off with a story from 1821: One Sunday evening, a 29-year-old lawyer was in his study preparing for a trial. Hoping to pepper his argument with references to Holy Scripture, he pulled a bible off of a shelf and began to flip through the pages, looking for a particular passage. Soon, however, he found himself more and more absorbed by the text; and as he read page after page, he found himself consumed with questions that had never concerned him before. Then he heard a voice. It asked, "What are you waiting for? Are you leading a righteous life?" As this man later told the story, the questions posed to him terrified him; he felt like he was lost. Then, according to his account, he "met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face" and heard him ask, "Will you doubt?" The man answered, "No I will not doubt; I cannot doubt." Then suddenly, as he related later, his fears and feelings of hopeless and sinfulness left him. He'd been "born again." This man's name was Charles Grandison Finney, and he would soon quit his legal practice to become a preacher. Not just any preacher, but the most famous and influential of all the preachers in the great evangelical movement known as the Second Great Awakening.

Before we go any further into this incredible story of the Second Great Awakening, let's set out some objectives for this lecture. We'll focus on four main things: First, we'll look at the state of American religion around the year 1800. From there, we'll move on to examine the beginnings of the revival movement that came to be called the Second Great Awakening. Then we'll explore the emergence of this man we just talked about, Charles Grandison Finney, and how he became a key figure in the movement. Then finally, we'll examine the many ways in which Finney and the Second Great Awakening reshaped American society.

OK, let's start by assessing the state of American religion around the year 1800. Let's start with a statistic that might surprise you: Historians estimate that only about 1 in 10 Americans in the 1790s belonged to any

formal church; just 10 percent. Why is this so? We should point out one important thing here, just to make sure we're talking about the same thing: Most Americans in this period were religious. They believed in God and the basic teachings of Christianity, and we can see this in their diaries, and in their letters, and speeches; we know there's a high degree of religiosity. So the 10 percent figure does not mean that 90 percent were irreligious or nonbelievers, but it did mean that they chose not to affiliate with any formal religious organization. Now let's get back to the question: why?

There were a number of influences at work here: First, there was the Enlightenment; that powerful intellectual movement of the 18th century that emphasized reason, science, and progress (basically the power of people to improve their surroundings). The Enlightenment was not by definition hostile to religion, but it did promote a more "rational" form of theology that deemphasized the role of God in everyday life. The most popular form of Enlightenment in Christianity was "deism," a notion first developed in France. Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and several other Founders were deists. They believed that there was a God, but they believed that he'd created the universe and then basically stepped back from it. Some people in this time period liked to use the metaphor "the Great Clockmaker": God made the world, then he wound it up, and then he stepped away and let it run. Under this way of thinking, most religious dogma about things like original sin was irrelevant at best, maybe even harmful. So, too, was the notion that God intervened in the lives of people, either to answer their fervent prayers or to punish them for their sins. Franklin and Jefferson and other deists typically tended to be anyway tolerant of churchgoers; they weren't anti-religion but it just wasn't for them.

But there were some deists like Tom Paine—the Tom Paine of "Common Sense" fame—who attacked organized religion. Paine wrote a book in the 1790s called *The Age of Reason* in which he criticized much of religion as "superstition," and Christianity in particular he said was "the strangest religion ever set up ... [because] it committed a murder upon Jesus in order to redeem mankind from the sin of eating an apple." You can see why Tom Paine was not a very popular person at that point and why he was essentially deleted from the pantheon of Founding Fathers; he's really kind of written

out of the American story until the middle of the 20th century when people started to take him a little bit more seriously.

Anyway, back to the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment also led to the development of two rationalist forms of Christianity: groups called the Universalists and the Unitarians. They rejected many precepts of traditional Christianity, like the doctrine of predestination and the divinity of Jesus. To them, Jesus was simply a great religious teacher; he was not the Son of God.

A second factor that explains why so many Americans were “unchurched”—if we want to call it that—in 1800 was the disestablishment of religion after the Revolution. We talked about this in some detail in our lecture on Roger Williams and the Freedom of Religion. Disestablishment meant that there was no longer an official church or sect given special status and tax support from the government. This trend would eventually lead to more religiosity, because basically in the 19th century it will create a competitive marketplace for churches; but initially it seems to have diminished church attendance.

A third factor that explains why so many Americans were unchurched around 1800 is that Americans were on the move. They were moving both out onto the frontier and from the country to the city. This highly mobile population—some people argue the Americans were the most mobile in the world—this fact of movement disconnected people from their family networks and from formal institutions like churches; so people were dislocated from the traditional structures of life. And out on the frontier, even if you wanted to go to church, there typically was no church. All this added up to a society where, as one French immigrant at the time put it, “religious indifference is imperceptibly disseminated from one end of the continent to the other”; basically saying that it’s just in the air in this new American country.

OK, now it’s time to begin examining the beginnings of this revival movement; the one that we are eventually going to start calling the Second Great Awakening. As you can imagine, this situation of deism, Unitarianism, rationalism, secularism, and so forth was pretty upsetting to many Americans who still believed in formal Christianity; and they wondered—really, seriously—was American society fast descending into a world of sin and unbelief? They decided maybe it was, and they had to do something about it,

they had to stop this from happening; and their answer was evangelization. There had been an earlier round of evangelical fervor in America back in the mid-1700s—this was called the First Great Awakening—but the one brewing around 1800 would exert a far greater influence; and it started with efforts by Presbyterians, a church that had roots earlier established in the mid-1700s, and also with two other small denominations (really small denominations) that were formed only recently: the Baptists and the Methodists. All three of these churches began to dispatch itinerant preachers basically to reach the unchurched and recruit them; or, as they liked to say in kind of biblical language, to “harvest” them. They typically went out to the frontier; that was their special area where they felt like they were most needed.

The message and doctrine of this early Second Great Awakening did not follow a consistent script; there’s no set theology here. It varied by preacher, it varied by location; but there were some common ideas that were shared throughout the movement. Let’s look at a couple of them: One of them was the argument that true Christians had to reject deism and rationalism; that these were just misguided, really antithetical views. They had to then also put God and Jesus back into the center of their lives. Third, they had to practice a fervent and active piety that suffused every aspect of their lives; church couldn’t just be a thing done on Sundays, it had to really be central to their life.

One important idea was a new one: Most of these preachers rejected what they called “predestination.” Predestination had been at the heart of Calvinism in Europe and Puritanism in America for centuries. Predestination argued that Christians were powerless to save themselves. Salvation could not be earned by good works or righteous living; God had basically already decided each person’s fate. In the Second Great Awakening, preachers said the opposite was true: Each person could affect his or her own destiny by choosing to live a pious, faithful, God-centered life that avoided sin. A Christian could earn God’s grace and God’s intervention in their life. This was a powerful and optimistic message, and it caught on.

So, too, was the style of the Second Great Awakening: These new preachers rejected the staid and intellectual approach to preaching of the more established churches, and instead they embraced a more emotional and

high-energy evangelical style. This new, optimistic, high-energy version of Christianity was most often spread by these itinerant preachers; the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian preachers we mentioned. Probably the most famous was a guy named Reverend Peter Cartwright. He was a Methodist preacher who traveled far and wide throughout the American frontier, urging people to find their way back to God. He was fond of saying “Nothing but the principles of the Bible can save our happy nation or the world.” Some ministers around this time—the early 1800s—joined forces to establish a new tradition: something called the “camp meeting.”

The first really notable one took place in 1801 in Cane Ridge, Kentucky. It drew thousands of people from the surrounding area—some people say as many as 25,000—and it lasted a week. Participants and observers were overwhelmed by its emotional intensity and its religious fervor. People who went reported that people fainted and that other people rolled on the ground; it was really, I guess we’d call it, a full body experience. The success of this camp meeting spread and spawned all kinds of imitations, because it seemed to be what people wanted and drew lots and lots of people to these events. Let’s listen to how one person who attended in 1806 described this intensity, this kind of new way of experiencing religion: “Will I ever see anything more like the day of Judgment on this side of eternity—to see people running, yes, running from every direction to the stand, weeping ... and shouting for joy. ... O! Glorious day they went home singing [and] shouting.” That’s a very typical kind of description of how people experience these evangelical revivals.

There are two aspects of this Second Great Awakening that we should emphasize; things that really mark it as something new. We’ve already pointed out a couple; here are two more: One, it represented the democratization of Religion, and this was clearly in step with the emerging democratic spirit in early America. Remember, we noted this aspect in an earlier lecture when we talked about the spread of universal suffrage (for white men, anyway, of course); so this idea of democracy is spreading, it’s kind of creeping into all sorts of institutions and ideas, and it certainly affected religion. The central message of this Second Great Awakening evangelicalism was that you, on your own, could find salvation. You didn’t need a hierarchical church, you didn’t need a highly-educated minister to guide you; you could

read the Bible, or you could attend a revival, and you could find salvation. That's a highly democratic notion that really marks a break from traditional Christianity; it's a decentralized and individualized theology.

Another related aspect of the Second Great Awakening is that it attracted many women; in fact, in some areas, women constituted a majority of participants. This fact reflected the democratic spirit of the movement that we just talked about, but some historians actually argue that it reflected the impact of the Industrial Revolution; and we noted this, how the Industrial Revolution changed everything, in our lecture on Samuel Slater. The onset of factories—textile factories were the first—eliminated the need for home spinning of yarn and weaving of cloth, which were, of course, two jobs that were traditionally very important roles for women to fulfill in the household economy. Participation in the Second Great Awakening provided—at least historians believe—women with an opportunity to take on new roles of significance. They could work within churches and find work with the affiliated charities of these churches and reform movements as well.

The Second Great Awakening also attracted large numbers of African Americans. The message of empowerment and initiative at the heart of the movement, along with the racism they experienced within the white congregations to which they belonged, inspired many African Americans to break away and to form independent congregations. This was not simply confined to free African Americans; it also influenced the lives of many enslaved African Americans, including a lot of them who went on to become preachers. We should point out—this is kind of a shocker statistic—that in 1800, most African Americans, most slaves in America, were not Christians. They're about to become Christianized, and they're caught up in this egalitarian spirit of the revival Christianity of the Second Great Awakening; they're catching some of the messages of freedom, redemption, and so forth that had special resonance with them. One of these preachers was a man named Nat Turner. Turner lived on a farm in Southampton, Virginia; and in the 1820s, he became caught up in the evangelical fervor that was really sort of racing throughout the land. It led him to believe that he had been chosen by God to destroy the sin of slavery. In August 1831, he led the largest slave uprising in American history. We should also point out that almost three decades later, John Brown, in 1859, would lead an

attempted slave insurrection at Harpers Ferry, and he was very much of this evangelical tradition.

Most of what I'm describing here became evident before the 1820s, the period when Charles Grandison Finney emerged as the key figure in the movement. Finney was the man whose conversion experience I described at the start of this lecture. Let's learn a little bit more about him. Where did he come from? Finney was born in Connecticut on a farm in 1792, and he was the youngest of 15 children. He grew up, received a basic education, but did not attend college. Instead, because he was a pretty smart guy, he was apprenticed to a local lawyer to study law, which was fairly traditional in those days. In his early 20s, he opened a law practice in upstate New York; and then, at age 29, after this conversion experience, he quit the practice of law. I love the way he put it: He said he quit the practice of law to work on "a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause," basically using wonderful lawyerly language to make this point that he'd gone from arguing cases in everyday life to arguing God's case before the country, before the world. Finney went on to study the ministry and he was eventually ordained a Presbyterian minister.

Almost immediately, Finney struck out for the western part of New York State, to towns along the Erie Canal route; and there he led a series of spectacular revivals that drew thousands of participants and harvested—is a phrase they liked to use—many, many converts. Other evangelical Great Awakening preachers had come before Finney, but there was something extraordinary about him. In part, it had a lot to do with his preaching style. Finney's revivals were high energy, emotional affairs and some of them lasted weeks. Finney, not surprisingly, approached preaching like the lawyer he had once been. He spoke to the faithful like a jury that he was trying to win over; and like a good lawyer, he alternated his style as he went along. Sometimes he earnestly pleaded with people to see the light, to see his position. Other times, he shouted at them and he cajoled them, sort of browbeat them, to see his point. In so doing, Finney made an incredible direct, intimate connection with his listeners. He sometimes prayed for sinners by name. He also established something that he called the "anxious bench"; I love this phrase. This was a bench up in the front of the revival where anybody who was sort of sitting on the fence, not really sure if they

were ready to be saved or commit, could go up there while the congregation would offer special prayers on their behalf; the anxious bench.

You can get a sense of Finney's style by looking at some of the many paintings from the time period of these revivals, including one that was painted in 1839. It's called "Religious Camp Meeting" and it's by an artist named Maze Burbank. In this one—it's a typical one—it shows a preacher on a stage cajoling a crowd of men and women, what appears to be a massive crowd, and many of these people are overwrought with emotion from the experience. Some of them literally lie limp on the ground and are being assisted by their friends and family. Let's listen to how one man described one of Finney's revivals. This had taken place in Upstate New York in Oneida County. This man argued that once Finney was done the region was "completely overthrown by the Holy Ghost, [so much so that] the theater has been deserted, the tavern sanctified ... and far higher and purer enjoyment has been found in exercises of devotion." He's saying once Finney came through town and did one of his revivals that everything was transformed; and this is why this particular area of Upstate New York came to be known as "The Burned-Over District," because there were so many preachers—not just Finney—going back and forth preaching this kind of fiery gospel that it literally scorched the earth.

Finney's appeal was not merely his showmanship and passion; there was more to it than that. It was also his message. Like the other Second Great Awakening evangelicals who came before him, Finney rejected predestination and he stressed free will. People, Finney said, were what he called "free moral agents"; they were in complete control of their salvation. They could choose to change their ways, and get right with the Lord (so this is pretty standard stuff). But Finney took it one step further: He developed and popularized a doctrine of Perfectionism. It argued that true Christians had an obligation—had the ability—to strive literally for perfection. Few—Finney admitted—if anybody was going to be able to reach this state of perfection, but everybody was obligated to try. If they succeeded, they would bring on what was called "The Millennium," the return of Jesus to the earth to preside over a 1,000-year period of peace and holiness, essentially establishing heaven on earth. That's right: This idea of Perfectionism said

that human beings could speed up the Second Coming if they reformed themselves and those around them.

Here is where we see the major impact of the Second Great Awakening in general and Charles Grandison Finney in particular. Perfectionism and Millennialism meant more than just simply cleaning up your own act as an individual Christian. It compelled Christians to look around them for forms of sin that they could eliminate; that they had to eliminate. Finney and the Second Great Awakening, in other words, played a central role in inspiring the many, many reform movements that characterized the period. As Finney put it, “true saints love reform”; and these included efforts to eliminate slavery, to abolish alcohol, to abolish prostitution, as well as efforts to reform prisons and the treatment of the mentally ill. These movements attracted many women and thus indirectly the Second Great Awakening also helped inspire the movement for women’s rights.

Let’s go a little further in discussing this connection between Perfectionism and the realms of reform. Let’s listen to a historian named Ronald Walters describe this role of Perfectionism. Ronald Walters said:

Perfectionism helped create an “ultraist” mentality which insisted that anything short of millennial standards should not be tolerated, a cast of mind common among antebellum crusaders. It was manifested in such things as utopian efforts to construct a new social order, calls for slavery to end immediately, a belief that any alcohol was evil, and an unwillingness ... to compromise.

It wasn’t just theology; it actually had a role to play in society. Perfectionism, in other words, inspired many major efforts to reform American society. The great novelist of this era, Herman Melville, said it most succinctly. He said: Evangelicals were determined to “gospelize the world anew.” Or as Finney put it, in a little bit more grand language: “To the universal reformation of the world they stand committed.”

To fully appreciate this impact of Finney and the Second Great Awakening in reshaping American society, let’s take a closer look at one of the reform movements most closely associated with it: the temperance movement.

The other movement, of course, is abolitionism, but we'll talk about that in greater detail in our next lecture. Let's start with a question regarding temperance: Did America have a drinking problem or an alcohol problem in 1820? The short answer is "yes." In 1820, American adults consumed an average of seven gallons of hard liquor per year. What does that mean? How does that compare to modern times? It's about two-and-a-half times greater than what Americans in 2010 consume. Let's listen to what one itinerant preacher said, in his mind describing the depths of this problem. He said: "a house could not be raised, a field of wheat cut down, nor could there be a log rolling, a husking, a quilting, a wedding, or funeral without the aid of alcohol"; it was just central to American life, particularly out on the frontier. Most of this alcohol was whiskey made by farmers on the frontier who found it more profitable to convert a lot of their grain into alcohol rather than to try to lug it through the woods and over the mountains to the market. The rest of this alcohol was hard cider made from apples; and most people don't know this, but all those the trees planted by John Chapman—you may know him as Johnny Appleseed—were to grow cider apples; not apples for eating or for making pies, but for making hard cider.

In any case, Americans drank a prodigious amount of alcohol in 1820; and so, a temperance movement, inspired by the Millennialist visions preached by the Second Great Awakening, soon emerged. Christianity had always frowned on drunkenness, but there had rarely been times where Christianity called for an outright ban on alcohol; so this represents kind of a different moment. What these evangelicals in this time period objected to was not alcohol per se, but what in their minds alcohol inevitably led to: infidelity, domestic violence, wasted family resources (drinking all that money away), and poor performance at work, which might ultimately lead to a person losing their job. The first national temperance society was founded in 1826, and this movement exploded in size. By the mid-1830s, there were hundreds of temperance organizations across the country and a total membership of around 1.5 million.

Some of these reformers advocated not prohibition but moderate consumption of alcohol, basically trying to get people to cut back; but increasingly the emphasis was on prohibition. The argument was that alcohol was a slippery slope; you're better off avoiding it altogether. You may have

seen images from this time period; they always have the same title, it's called "A Drunkard's Progress"; there are many versions of it. They typically show a series of stages in which a handsome "man about town," looking quite good and happy with himself, gradually over the series of stages becomes a "drunkard" whose life begins to fall apart. The Reverend Lyman Beecher of Boston, of the famous Beecher family and a contemporary of Finney's, described the problem this way in 1828; let's listen to how he put it in pretty dramatic terms:

Intemperance is the sin of our land, and, with our boundless prosperity, is coming in upon us like a flood; and if anything shall defeat the hopes of the world, which hang upon our experiment of civil liberty, it is that river of fire, which is rolling through the land, destroying the vital air, and extending around an atmosphere of death.

He's saying it's not just a bad thing in general, it threatens to undo the republic, literally; it's not just sinful in the religious realm, it's actually going to undo the republic.

Initially these temperance crusaders aimed their message at individuals; they wanted to get people to forsake alcohol, to take the pledge as they called it. To get the message out, they took advantage of the new developments in communications technology brought about by the Industrial Revolution; we'll talk about these a little bit more when we get to our lecture on the Communication Revolution. But suffice it to say, evangelicals took advantage of the new techniques in publishing—industrial publishing—to crank out mountains of bibles, spiritual tracts, religious magazines, and temperance literature, like that print I talked about, "A Drunkard's Progress."

But by the 1850s, many became convinced that the sin of alcohol was just too dangerous, and it had to be made illegal. Here's where we see the crossover from the Second Great Awakening Perfectionism, from a private moral crusade, to a public crusade aimed at changing society's laws. So these temperance advocates launched the nation's first Prohibition effort; many people don't know that we actually tried Prohibition way back in the antebellum period. The state of Maine was the first. In 1851, they passed a

law prohibiting alcohol; and very quickly, by 1855, 13 of America's 31 states passed similar what they called "Maine laws" that banned the production and sale of alcohol. Like the national prohibition effort in the 1920s, these laws ultimately failed and were repealed; but the overall impact of the temperance crusade caused a significant decline in alcohol consumption in America. The typical American went from consuming that staggering (literally) quantity of alcohol of seven gallons of hard liquor per year in 1820 to consuming about only three gallons by 1840.

This is a good place to stop and point out that one of the most enthusiastic groups who joined the Second Great Awakening were middle class Americans. They were some of the most active participants not only in the Second Great Awakening but also the temperance crusade; and many historians point to an important connection here: They saw this essentially a connection between the values of the Second Great Awakening and the values that were emerging in the new industrial order; this industrialism that we have been talking about. Industrialism required a life of order; a life of clean living; a life of discipline, thrift, hard work, and sobriety. These things might save your soul, but they would also put you in really good position to succeed in this new competitive commercial world, this new world of the industrial economy. Evangelicalism, in other words, fit nicely in this world of the American middle class, this emerging world. We see this in their own personal efforts to curb alcohol use, not only their own but of their employees. Long before the prohibition laws of the 1850s, employers began to cut down and eventually eliminate the longstanding custom of allowing workers to drink on the job. Workers, of course, did not like this; they initially resisted it, but as the power of the employer grew in the 19th century, these rules became standard: No more drinking on the job; no more 10 o'clock beer; and that sort of thing.

I think it's safe to say that the Second Great Awakening had a major impact on American society in the antebellum period; and one way to measure the Second Great Awakening's reach is the rapid rise in churchgoing. We started out by saying in the 1790s only 10 percent of Americans belonged to a formal church? By 1840, it's 75 percent. Remember we said the Methodist Church was a tiny little organization in 1790? It 1840 it has a million members, making it the largest religious denomination in the country. Another measure

is the growth of the American ministry: Back in 1780, there were fewer than 2, 000 ministers in all of America. By 1845, the number swelled to 40,000. This boom in religiosity was best summed up by Alexis de Tocqueville, the French nobleman who visited America in the 1830s and then wrote a famous book called *Democracy in America*. In this book he wrote, “There is no country in the whole world in which the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America.” Think about how different this is from the statement from that other Frenchman who we quoted back in the earlier part of our lecture. In the late 1700’s that earlier Frenchman wrote of “religious indifference” existing “from one end of the continent to the other.” Clearly, in 40 years a lot had changed, and a good deal of it stemmed from the work of Charles Grandison Finney.

We have to leave it there in this discussion of the Second Great Awakening. For our next lecture, we’ll explore the launching of the abolitionist movement, something connected to the Second Great Awakening.

Until then, thank you.

1831 The Righteous Crusade—Abolition

Lecture 17

While many individuals and organizations had worked to bring an end to slavery before 1831, William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper, *The Liberator*, demanded the immediate and uncompensated abolition of slavery, as well as racial equality. Later that same year, Nat Turner launched a bloody slave insurrection that claimed dozens of lives. This incident sent shock waves across the South and inspired both greater vigilance against slave insurrections and a harsher stand against abolitionists.

On August 22, 1831, the slave rebellion led by Nat Turner in Southampton, Virginia, led to the deaths of 55 whites and as many as 200 slaves (during both the revolt and its aftermath), making it the bloodiest slave revolt in American history. In the aftermath, many blamed Northern abolitionists for the violence, in particular William Lloyd Garrison and his new newspaper, *The Liberator*. Garrison's entry into abolitionism and Turner's bloody insurrection began the great debate over slavery.

Nat Turner's Rebellion initially prompted Virginia politicians to open a public debate over adopting policy of gradual emancipation. Most emancipation proposals included a plan to recolonize former slaves back to Africa. In the end, all the proposals were defeated, and Virginia opted to tighten its control over slavery.

The slave-based economy in the American South in 1831 was booming. Cotton growers were moving into what are now Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, bringing some 1 million slaves with them, in response to the Industrial Revolution's insatiable demand for cotton.

Garrison did not invent abolition. Resistance to slavery began the moment the first slaves were brought to Jamestown in 1619. In the mid-18th century, white Americans, particularly the Quakers, began a recognizable antislavery movement. Revolutionary talk of liberty, equality, and inalienable rights

further spurred the debate. Some slaveholders voluntarily freed their slaves, but others considered slavery a necessary evil.

The first significant antislavery organization was the American Colonization Society, founded in 1816, which called for slaveholders to return slaves to Africa, to the colony of Liberia. But few slaveholders wanted to free their slaves, and most free blacks did not want to go to Africa.

Some of the most convincing pieces of literature were firsthand accounts of slavery's brutality written by escaped slaves.

Two years after launching *The Liberator*, Garrison helped form the American Anti-Slavery Society, which called for immediate emancipation of all slaves without

financial compensation for slaveholders. They also condemned efforts to return blacks to Africa. Freed slaves had every right to stay in the United States, a nation their labors had helped build.

The society grew rapidly, and its members flooded Congress with antislavery petitions. In 1836, the House enacted a gag rule prohibiting the reading or discussing of antislavery petitions in Congress. But the abolitionists took their message directly to the people through books, newspapers, and pamphlets. Some of the most convincing pieces of literature were firsthand accounts of slavery's brutality written by escaped slaves, including Frederick Douglass's autobiography.

As the abolitionist movement gained momentum, Southern defenders of slavery mobilized. They began to speak of slavery as a positive good, offering "savage" Africans the blessings of civilization and Christianity. Blacks, they argued, were naturally childlike and unable to care for themselves; slavery put them under the kind care of a white master. All the accounts of violence and deprivation, they said, were abolitionist lies. Finally, they argued that the Constitution protected the right to own property, including slaves.

In 1848, the United States won the Mexican War and acquired a vast tract of new land in the West. Leaders immediately began arguing over whether

slavery would be permitted in these new territories. From this point forward, the slavery question dominated American politics. ■

Suggested Reading

Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*.

Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*.

Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619–1877*.

Questions to Consider

1. What's significant about the fact that many slaveholders circa 1800 considered slavery a "necessary evil" but by the 1830s were calling it a "positive good"?
2. How did abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass manage to convince a growing number of Northerners that slavery was incompatible with American ideals of liberty and equality? What was their most effective tactic?

1831 The Righteous Crusade—Abolition

Lecture 17—Transcript

Hello again. Let's begin by heading back to 1831. In the early morning hours of August 22, 1831, the white citizens of Southampton, Virginia awakened to discover that the great fear that lurked just below the surface of all slaveholding societies had been realized: A violent slave insurrection, led by a man named Nat Turner, had begun.

Nat Turner was a deeply religious man who believed he'd been chosen by God to destroy the sinful institution of human bondage. He'd planned and plotted for months and waited for a sign from God that the hour of the insurrection had arrived; and it came, in his mind, in late August, 1831. At 2:00 am, Turner and six of his fellow conspirators broke into his owner's home, and with axes they killed the master, his wife and child, and two apprentices. Then, from there, they fanned out into the neighboring region, moving from house to house, and they killed nearly every white person they encountered. The alarm was soon sounded—because a society like this is prepared for this sort of thing—and the insurrection eventually put down, but not before at least 55 whites had been killed, making it the bloodiest slave revolt in American history. In retribution, white militias killed between 100 and 200 slaves, many of whom had nothing to do with the revolt. Turner and 55 other slaves were captured, tried, found guilty, and executed by the state of Virginia.

In the aftermath of Nat Turner's Rebellion, Virginians and other southerners asked each other: What could possibly have caused their slaves—slaves that they believed were happy and content with their lot in life—to lash out so violently against their masters? Many answers were offered, but the most popular was that the slave insurrection in Southampton, Virginia had been inspired by northern abolitionists. In particular, people cited a man who had recently burst onto the American scene. Back in January of 1831, William Lloyd Garrison had begun publishing his fiery abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*; and in this paper, he announced in blistering language the launching of a new and more radical abolitionist movement. This movement would call for the immediate end of slavery with no compensation for

slaveholders. Let's take a moment to listen to the opening salvo, if you will, from William Lloyd Garrison in his newspaper:

I am aware that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or to speak, or write, with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen;—but urge me NOT to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD.

Garrison sort of sets the tone for his style of abolitionism, which is no holds barred. He's a fiery abolitionist, he's absolutely committed to this cause, and he's not going to back down one inch.

While Garrison declared himself vehement in the cause of abolitionism, he also let people know that he's a pacifist; he's not calling for insurrections. But several times in that first year of his newspaper, he did warn southerners that they should expect an increased number of bloody insurrections until they freed their slaves, it was only natural. Southerners read this and then saw the insurrection in Virginia and saw this as instigation to violence, and they vowed to tighten their grip on their slaves and to fight back against northern abolitionists who were meddling with Southern institutions. Garrison, in turn, denied that he had any connection to Nat Turner's revolt; and he further vowed that he would continue his work to abolish slavery, regardless of what Southerners said. We should note that there's no evidence Nat Turner had any knowledge of William Lloyd Garrison or his newspaper; he was acting for other reasons. Nonetheless, we can see that in this pivotal year of 1831 these two events—Garrison's entry into abolitionism and Turner's bloody insurrection—helped spark what became the great debate over slavery in America. Over the next 30 years the slavery debate would come to dominate American politics and lead, eventually, to secession and Civil War.

Before we go any further, let's set out our objectives for this lecture. In this lecture, we'll focus on five things: First, we'll look at the status of slavery in roughly 1831. Then, we'll look at early abolitionist efforts before 1831. From there, we'll move on to explore in greater detail the emergence of William Lloyd Garrison and his style of fiery and immediate abolitionism. Then, from there, we'll look at the counterattacks; Southerners weren't going to take this sitting down, and they offered a proslavery counterattack that we'll look at. Then, finally, we'll examine the growth and spread of abolitionism in the 1840s and 1850s.

Let's begin by examining the status of slavery in 1831. One of the most remarkable results of Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831 is that it initially prompted leading politicians in Virginia to open a public debate over the topic of gradual emancipation. The state's governor, John Floyd—who was a slave owner—took the lead in this effort; and even though he was a slave owner, he believed that the only way to prevent more insurrections was for Virginia to adopt a plan of gradual emancipation. Over the next six months, many proposals came forward for gradual emancipation programs, and they were debated. Most of these included a plan to recolonize any freed slaves and send them back to Africa. But in the end, all of these proposals were defeated; and instead, Virginia went in a very different direction: They opted to tighten their control over slavery. They strengthened night patrols; they built up the state militia; they began confiscating abolitionist literature in the mails, especially Garrison's newspaper, *The Liberator*; and they passed laws making it a crime to criticize slavery. They also tightened discipline over the enslaved: They curtailed the movement of slaves between plantations; they barred slaves from gathering, even for church, without white supervision.

On one level, we can understand this reaction. Virginians had just experienced a horrific insurrection and the state was home to 470,000 slaves, nearly 40 percent of the total population. But there were larger reasons that explain Virginia's rejection of emancipation. What was the most prominent explanation for this? The simple answer is the slave-based economy of the American South in 1831 was booming. American cotton growers at this very moment were pushing headlong into the American southeast, to the fertile lands in what is now Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and beyond that; land that President Andrew Jackson at that very moment was using the

power of the federal government to expel Native Americans from. When these planters moved into these regions, they brought with them hundreds of thousands of slaves. Historians refer to this as the “second middle passage”; the first middle passage was the journey from Africa to the Americas.

These planters were responding to the emerging Industrial Revolution’s insatiable demand for cotton. Remember, in an earlier lecture, we established that link between slavery and the Industrial Revolution; this was the lecture on Samuel Slater and the birth of the factory. By 1831, Southern cotton production had begun to soar; over 720, 000 bales. In 1840, it nearly doubled to 1.4 million bales. Ten years later, it exceeded 3 million bales. Ten years after that, it soared to 4.8 million bales. Cotton was a booming, booming business. Southern cotton by this time accounted for 60 percent of American exports, and 75 percent of the world supply of cotton. By way of comparison, Southern investment in slaves by 1860 was a whopping \$3 billion. Compare that to just \$2. 2 billion invested in the entire country in manufacturing and in railroads. Little wonder that Southerners in this time declared, “Cotton is King.”

It’s important to make clear that William Lloyd Garrison did not invent abolition; far from it. For one thing, we know that resistance to slavery began when slavery began back in 1619. But it wasn’t until the middle of the 18th century that white Americans began to seriously question slavery, and the first notable group to do this was Quakers. In the 1750s, several branches of Quakers in the north voted to disown any member who was involved in the slave trade. During the Revolution, with the air filled with talk of liberty, equality, and inalienable rights, a growing number of Americans began to question if it was possible for a nation to be dedicated to freedom while also dedicated to slavery. Some of the loudest voices, of course, were free African Americans. In Massachusetts, for example, a convention of free blacks in 1777 drew up a resolution and sent it on to the Massachusetts legislature urging them to abolish slavery. Massachusetts agreed, and outlawed slavery in its constitution. Most northern states would soon follow.

After the Revolution, many slaveholders began advocating voluntarily freeing their slaves; and some of them were motivated by these ideals of the Revolution. Others were motivated by economics, believing that

really slavery had ceased to be profitable, particularly in the upper South. Remember, the Industrial Revolution hadn't happened yet, so there's no great demand for cotton and very little cotton at all was being actually grown in America at this time. There were many remarkable examples in this post-Revolutionary period of voluntary manumission or emancipation. In the 1790s, George Washington established in his will that his 124 slaves would be freed on his death. The great planter Robert Carter similarly freed 509 slaves on his own. Most slaveholders, of course, kept their slaves.

But it's very important to note the way in which slaveholders justified the decision to hold onto their slaves. They said—this became sort of the phrase of the day—that it was a “necessary evil” (slavery was). They argued that they'd prefer not to have slaves, but they were stuck with them; their ancestors had established slavery and now they were stuck with it. The only thing worse than slavery, they argued, was setting slaves free, because they were convinced that if this was done it would trigger a race war. Thomas Jefferson famously characterized this dilemma as “having the wolf by the ears.” What he means by this, of course, is if you imagine you're attacked by a wolf and you grab him by the ears, now suddenly you're safe because you have this vicious beast by the ears; the only problem is that you can't let go, and if you ever do let go the wolf will devour you. That sort of explains in Jefferson's mind and the minds of many slaveholders the dilemma of slavery: that they'd like to let go, but they can't. Keep this “necessary evil” or “wolf by the ears” concept in mind, because you'll see that decades later—in the 1830s when the slave labor economy is booming—that slaveholders will offer a new and far more positive description of slavery.

The first significant antislavery organization was called the American Colonization Society, and they were founded in 1816. As their name suggests, they called on slaveholders to emancipate their slaves and then immediately ship them back to Africa; and they advocated sending them to a colony that they had established, Liberia, a colony specially founded for this purpose. In other words, they proposed to solve Jefferson's dilemma of holding “the wolf by the ears” by freeing the wolves and then sending the “wolves” thousands of miles away; and that's because few Americans could picture blacks and whites living harmoniously in freedom in the same society. But the colonization movement faced three major problems that eventually led

to its failure: First of all, few slaveholders wanted to free their slaves, as simple as that. Second, the great majority of African Americans did not want to go to back to Africa; they considered America their home, and they said as much. Third, most white Americans, both north and south, rejected abolition. Indeed, they considered abolitionists strange and eccentric radicals.

So this was the setting for the start of Garrison's crusade in 1831, and it brings to mind one of my favorite maxims about history: that history is the study of surprises. People in the past, just like us now, are always oblivious to the major event that's soon to occur; and I think this concept perfectly describes the situation in America in 1831. If you could have taken a poll of Americans in 1831 and asked them "Will slavery ever be abolished" most Americans would say "Absolutely not, how could it possibly happen? It's inconceivable." But it would be little more than 30 years from that point that slavery would, in fact, be abolished.

Because few Americans supported abolition, few people took notice when, in 1831, Garrison started publishing his *Liberator*. But Garrison would soon become a major figure in American society. Two years after launching his paper, he joined with other abolitionists to found the American Anti-Slavery Society. This new abolitionist movement was different from its predecessors in several important ways: First, it called for the immediate emancipation of all slaves. They argued since slavery was evil, any talk of gradual emancipation was immoral. Slavery just had to go, overnight. Second, since slavery was immoral, slaveholders should receive no financial compensation for the loss of their slaves. Many people had sort of offered a buyout program as an idea; they said no way. Slavery is simple; no compensation. Third, they condemned efforts to recolonize African Americans back to Africa. They argued black Americans had every right to stay in the United States, a nation their labors had helped to build.

The American Anti-Slavery Society soon grew very rapidly. In 1835, just two years after its founding, it had 400 chapters, all of them in the north. In 1838, there were 1,350 chapters and 250, 000 members. This new and more militant abolitionist movement soon made their presence known by flooding Congress with antislavery petitions. When they started this initiative in 1834, it so enraged Southern representatives that they passed a law that was

known as the “Gag Rule” in 1836 that effectively prohibited the reading or discussing of antislavery petitions in Congress. This did not stop radical abolitionists from spreading their antislavery message; far from it. For as abolitionism gained more publicity, more antislavery activists joined the cause, many as speakers and writers; and many of them faced intense and often violent opposition. Anti-abolitionist riots broke out in many northern states in the 1830s, almost always triggered when an abolitionist speaker came to town. Some of these events proved fatal. For example, Elijah Lovejoy, a contemporary of Garrison and a very prominent abolitionist publisher and speaker: He was murdered by an anti-abolitionist mob in Alton, Illinois in 1837.

With the rise of abolitionism, there was a movement of “pushback,” if you will, from Southerners to defend slavery; and some of the most effective to abolitionism did not involve violence like the kind we just saw involving Elijah Lovejoy, but rather propaganda, getting one’s message out. As the abolitionist movement gained momentum, Southern defenders of slavery mobilized. Starting in the 1830s, they began to fashion a powerful defense of slavery. This was one designed to convince themselves, as well as Northern whites, that slavery was a benign, moral system that upheld rather than violated American ideals. If you remember from earlier in this lecture, we noted that defenders of slavery after the Revolution described slavery as a “necessary evil.” Now, in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, defenders of slavery spoke unabashedly of slavery as a “positive good.” The basic points of this argument went as follows: Because slaves had lived as “savages” in Africa, slavery in America exposed them to the blessings of civilization. Another key point was that because slaves were pagans, slavery saved their souls by exposing them to the saving message of Christianity. Furthermore, the defenders of slavery noted, the Bible contained no condemnation of slavery, and they pointed to both the New Testament and the Old Testament when making this point. Let’s listen to what one of these commentators had to say in a book he wrote in the 1850s:

With regard to the assertion that slavery is against the spirit of Christianity, we ...deny most positively that there is anything in the Old or New Testament which would go to show that ... the master commits any offense in holding slaves. The children of Israel

themselves were slaveholders and were not condemned for it. All the patriarchs themselves were slaveholders; Abraham had more than three hundred.

This argument involved invoking the Bible: that the Bible either upheld slavery by pointing out that Abraham had 300, or was silent on the issue of slavery, never really condemning it.

Another argument in this pro-slavery rhetoric was that slaves were childlike and unable to take care of themselves, and slavery therefore helped them by putting them under the kind care of a white master who treated them like members of his extended family. They rejected all that talk of bullwhips and violence; they said that's all false, that's all lies, preached by abolitionist radicals who simply want to start a race war. They further went and said, "You know, the real slaves in America, the really oppressed people in America, are not people of African origin in the South, they are poor whites living in the North toiling for starvation wages in Northern factories." Talk about turning the tables. This proslavery campaign even had a "soundtrack." The most popular songs of the pre-Civil War era were the happy plantation songs written by a man from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania named Stephen Foster. You probably know a lot of these songs—"My Old Kentucky Home," "Swanee River," "Massa's in Da Cold Cold Ground"—and each of these provided sort of a beautiful melody behind these images of slavery being one big happy family where everybody's treated well and everybody has their place.

A final point in the defense of slavery was legal and constitutional. Advocates or defenders of slavery pointed out that the Constitution protected the right to own property, including property in slaves. Nowhere in the Constitution, they argued, was there a clause that granted Congress or the President the power to abolish slavery.

Abolitionists like Garrison worked to counter these proslavery messages, images, and songs and to convince white northerners that slavery was an evil that had to go; and their campaign also had several elements. First of all, they capitalized on controversy. As we noted, they actually created controversy with the Gag Rule; they created their own controversy and got a lot of publicity for it by flooding Congress with these antislavery petitions.

At other times, they capitalized on events that came out of nowhere, and one of them was the very famous case of the *Amistad*. On July 2, 1839, slaves on board a ship that was bound for a port in Cuba staged a revolt and they killed most of the crew. The crewmen that they didn't kill, they forced them to take them back to Africa. To make a long story short, they didn't get there. They ended up off the coast of Long Island, and they were seized by a U.S. revenue cutter and taken into custody. The Africans, of course, insisted that they were free, particularly since they had landed in the Northern United States. But several parties, including slave buyers in Cuba and the Queen of Spain, insisted the Africans were their property. Abolitionist lawyers and activists came to the *Amistad* rebels' defense, and through a series of trials that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court eventually managed to gain their freedom and return back to Africa. In the coming years, abolitionists would use other controversies like the seizure of escaped slaves in the early 1850s under the Fugitive Slave Act to force the American public, particularly in the North, to pay attention to this question of slavery and whether or not you could have a republic that was dedicated to liberty and a republic dedicated also to slavery.

A second front for abolitionists was politics. In 1840, a group of abolitionists formed the Liberty Party, dedicated to the abolition of slavery, and they thought they could do this by gaining political power. The Liberty Party only gained a few thousand votes in the coming years; but in 1848, its members merged with a much larger group of people opposed to the extension of slavery into the Western territories, and they formed what they called the Free Soil Party. Many of its members would later join the Republican Party when it formed in 1854. With each step, abolitionists succeeded in making slavery a national political issue.

Abolitionists also took advantage of the Communications Revolution, something we'll discuss in our next lecture, to publish a torrent of antislavery books, newspapers, and pamphlets that were designed to refute all the elements of the proslavery argument and to convince Americans, especially Northerners, that slavery was both sinful and incompatible with the ideals of American liberty and democracy. Some of the most convincing pieces of literature were the narratives written by actual escaped slaves. These firsthand accounts—more than 100 of them were published—provided

Northern readers with vivid and moving details of the brutality of slavery and the desperate attempts of the enslaved to escape. By far the most important narrative written in this period was by a man named Frederick Douglass. He escaped from slavery in Maryland in 1838 and made his way all the way to Massachusetts where he eventually made friends with William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison was impressed by Douglass's intelligence, the fact that he could read, and also he was a great speaker; so Garrison soon made Douglass the star antislavery speaker on the abolitionist circuit. In 1845, with Garrison's assistance, Douglass published his autobiography, which quickly became a bestseller.

Along with escaped slave narratives, abolitionists also relied on moving works of fiction to dramatize the evil of slavery. The most famous of all, of course, was Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It was published first in 1852 and sold 300,000 copies in one year, making it by far the best-selling book of the era; it outsold every other book except for the Bible. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* presented slavery as brutal, slave owners as not as kind fatherly figures but as cruel, and slaves not as content and happy but people that are miserable and desperate to escape. Harriet Beecher Stowe's account of the brutality of slavery and the humanity of the enslaved moved millions of Northerners to take an increasingly hostile view toward slavery, even if they weren't comfortable with the idea of racial equality; remember: You don't have to favor racial equality to be antislavery.

Finally, abolitionists both black and white assisted the escape of slaves from the South along a network of safe houses and private hiding places known as the "Underground Railroad." Its most famous "conductor"—that was the name they used, sort of metaphorically—was Harriet Tubman. She was an escaped slave who made 19 trips back to the South to lead scores of slaves, including many of her relatives, to freedom. Just think about the risks this woman took, and many, many others, going back into slavery to help people get out.

Now time won't permit a detailed explanation of slavery and abolition in the late 1840s and 1850s; some of this will be covered in our subsequent lecture on the Mexican American War and the Gold Rush. But suffice it to say that the abolitionist crusade launched by William Lloyd Garrison in

1831 succeeded in making slavery a central question in American politics in the decades before the Civil War. This becomes very clear when we think of the events of the 1850s; every one of them was animated by the slavery question: the Compromise of 1850, which paralyzed Congress for almost a year before it was reached, and one of the most important provisions of it was the Fugitive Slave Act that then subsequently all kinds of opposition and all kinds of fury when Northerners were essentially forced to help the federal government capture slaves and return them to captivity. A couple years after that, Congress was again in a fury trying to work out a deal called the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which was to organize the Kansas and Nebraska territories, and the question came up again: Will these be free territories or will they be slave territories?

In the midst of that, a mini civil war broke out in Kansas in 1856, leading to the phrase “Bleeding Kansas.” Of course, proslavery supporters sent people, arms, and money into Kansas, and antislavery forces also supported the antislavery people in Kansas; so it was a very, very bloody war in which several hundred people were killed. A year later, the Dred Scott decision by the Supreme Court in 1857 also raised the issue of slavery, and the Court ruled rather infamously that Dred Scott, as an African American, had actually no right to sue at all; but since he had done so, they ruled that no [black] man had any rights that any white man was bound to respect, and that slaves could never be citizens and therefore that’s that. In 1858, the nation—at least part of the nation—was compelled to follow the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates. Lincoln was a nobody at this point—very few people even knew who he was—but Douglas was a towering figure in the 1850s, and he had tried to position himself as the moderate, the guy who sort of negotiate this difficult issue of slavery and come up with a compromise; and the famous debates that he had with Lincoln in that senatorial race in 1858 really brought out all those key issues about slavery and all the technical points that would animate people right up to the beginning of the Civil War.

One year later, one abolitionist was not content to wait for a solution; he decided to take matters into his own hands: That’s John Brown, a white man from the North who gathered a group of radical abolitionists, both black and white, and they conspired to stage a slave insurrection in Virginia—in what now is West Virginia—at Harper’s Ferry in 1859; they wanted to seize the

federal arsenal, break in, take all the arms, and then spread them to slaves throughout the region and trigger kind of a rolling slave insurrection across the South. It was quickly put down, but it was another one of these pivotal moments in that 1850s series of events that take us up to the Civil War. We see the same thing in the election of 1860: The election of 1860 sees both major parties split along sectional lines, along the North and South—or put another way, free and slave—and Lincoln is elected with less than a majority of the American population voting for him in 1860; and then quickly that triggers the secession winter of 1860 and 1861.

Each of these events had the question of slavery right at its center, and it did so because the abolitionist movement launched by William Lloyd Garrison in 1831 and then carried on by Frederick Douglass and many, many other people—people whose names we don't even know—the collective impact of these people was to force Americans to confront a problem that many really preferred to ignore and pass on to another generation; and this was the problem that Abraham Lincoln spoke of in his famous “House Divided” speech in 1858: “A house divided against itself cannot stand,” he said, “I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free.” This dilemma of a nation that was half-slave and half-free would only be resolved in the next few years in the American Civil War.

In our next lecture, we're going to talk about the Communications Revolution, which might seem like something very different from the abolitionist movement, but remember: The abolitionists were able to get their message out to so many millions of Americans because of all those printing presses and a lot of things that we'll talk about in our next lecture. Until then, thank you.

1844 What's New? The Communication Revolution

Lecture 18

The invention of the telegraph by Samuel F. B. Morse in 1837, along with great advances in printing technology, sparked the communication revolution. The massive increase in available information transformed the American economy and led to the development of a national culture. The rise of modern political parties and the spread of the Second Great Awakening (and the reform movements it inspired) were likewise fueled by an explosion of inexpensive printed matter.

The communications system in the early 19th century was quite primitive in the United States—and everywhere else. Communication was limited to the speed of a messenger on foot, horse, or boat or to the distance one could see smoke or flag signals. Most Americans, therefore, lived isolated lives; news and information from the world beyond the horizon came infrequently and at great expense.

The United States was uniquely prepared to make the most of the coming communication revolution because of two factors: widespread literacy and the existing United States Post Office. Before the Civil War, the post office was the largest federal government agency. Citizens picked up their mail at the local post office, so post offices became gathering places for the exchange of news, information, and gossip. As a result, when the communication revolution began, the nation already had a vast distribution network to circulate this information.

The first technological innovation of the communication revolution was the steam-powered printing press, invented by the German printer Friedrich Koenig in 1811. The first such press arrived in New York in 1825. Its rapid printing process was helped along by Thomas Gilpin's 1816 invention of paper on a continuous roll and Richard March Hoe's 1840s invention of the rotary printing press.

The low cost of newspaper production led to the invention of the penny press, cheap newspapers sold on the street rather than only to subscribers.

Starting in the 1820s, newspaper publishers began including more political news, and political parties began to establish their own papers. Over time, editors began publishing more and more local news and more sensationalist stories of scandal, crime, corruption, and disaster.

The second key innovation of the communication revolution was the telegraph. Although today we see it as quaint and primitive, the telegraph had no precedent. For the first time in human history, people could send and receive information over vast distances—instantly!

The first successful single-wire telegraph system was invented in the United States by Samuel F. B. Morse. By 1840, Morse had patented his design and had developed the simple and effective code of dots and dashes that would bear his name. In 1843, Congress appropriated funds for an experimental 38-mile telegraph line from Washington DC to Baltimore, Maryland. A year



Even before the telegraph, post offices were the information hubs of many American communities, in a network primed for a communication revolution.

later, Morse successfully sent the first official telegraph message in United States history: “What hath God wrought!”

The telegraph system grew rapidly. The majority of messages were commercial—stock and commodities prices, interest rates, business deals, crop forecasts, even credit checks. As a result, the earliest lines in the telegraph network were built between major commercial centers like

For the first time in human history, people could send and receive information over vast distances—instantly!

New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. Network construction was boosted by demand for news from the Mexican-American War (1846–1848).

transportation revolution: Canals, steamboats, and railroads sped the delivery of letters, newspapers, and magazines to an ever-expanding republic.

Many of the innovations that spurred the communication revolution were part of the

The communication revolution began to knit together the country’s economy by making it possible for businessmen in heretofore isolated commercial centers to connect with each other. The massive increase in available information through the spread of magazines and newspapers led to the development of a national culture of shared interests and tastes. It played a role in popularizing the evangelical Christianity inspired by the Second Great Awakening, as well as the many reform movements the Awakening inspired. And it dramatically reshaped American politics by making possible the rise of modern, nationwide political parties. ■

Suggested Reading

Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*.

Sellers, *The Market Revolution*.

Silverman, *Lightning Man*.

Standage, *The Victorian Internet*.

Questions to Consider

1. Is it really accurate to say the impact of the telegraph was 100 times greater than the invention of the Internet? Why or why not?
2. How did the advent of new communication technology in the antebellum period change American society?

1844 What's New? The Communication Revolution

Lecture 18—Transcript

Alright, we meet again. Today, we turn our attention to a series of technological breakthroughs in antebellum America that combined to give us what historians term the “Communication Revolution.” Does this sound a little familiar? It should, because it’s a similar story that parallels the Transportation Revolution that we detailed in that earlier lecture; and when I say “parallels,” I mean that literally, since the early telegraph systems—a key part of this revolution—ran right alongside those early railroad tracks.

Let’s kick off this lecture, as we so often do, with a story: On January 8, 1815, General Andrew Jackson scored a decisive victory over the British at the Battle of New Orleans. It was the final battle of the War of 1812, a conflict that many people in the young nation called “America’s Second War for Independence.” Yet the victory would forever carry essentially a curious footnote, because back on December 24—15 days before Jackson’s victory—American and British officials had signed the Treaty of Ghent, ending the War of 1812. In other words, the famed Battle of New Orleans occurred after the war was over. The communications network in the United States in 1815 was so primitive it took four weeks for the War Department to get word of the treaty to Jackson. The news finally arrived in early February.

At the time, few Americans cared about this communication snafu. The nation exulted in the news of Jackson’s victory and elevated him to the status of a national hero with a decidedly bright future. But it would not be long before such a bizarre story of slow communication would be unimaginable, and that’s because the Communication Revolution is just about to occur. What did this Communication Revolution involve? To answer this question, we’re going to focus on four things in this lecture: First, we’ll detail a little bit more explicitly the poor state of communication in the early republic. Then, we’ll move on to two important factors that were actually already in place—kind of preexisting conditions—on the eve of the Communication Revolution that played key roles in its unfolding: widespread literacy, and an expansive post office network. Then, we’ll look at the three key technological breakthroughs at the heart of the revolution: First was the steam powered printing press; second was the telegraph; and third was the Transportation

Revolution, this other event that we talked about. It's part of this story, too. Finally, with the time we have left, we'll examine the profound economic, social, and political impacts of the Communication Revolution.

Let's start by assessing the state of communications in the early republic. As the story of the Battle of New Orleans makes clear, the communications system in the United States in the early 19th century was by all accounts primitive. But that's not due to the fact that the United States was a young and underdeveloped nation. In 1815, no nation in the world possessed what we would call a modern communication system. Communication in these days was limited—pretty much everywhere—to the speed of a messenger on foot, a horse, or a boat; or the distance that one could see, for example, looking at smoke signals or flag signals. This reality had not changed for thousands of years. Let's put it another way to put it in context: The fastest way to communicate was the same for Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C. as it was for George Washington in 1776; and that means the communication was a galloping horse. That puts it in perspective.

This reality of primitive communications meant that most Americans in the early 19th century lived fairly isolated lives in small towns, rural farmsteads; even in cities, they didn't get much information from the outside. News and information from the world beyond the horizon came infrequently. Printed matter, the kinds of things we're used to—newspapers, magazines—were very expensive and the mail system carried them very, very slowly. It was not uncommon in the decades before the Civil War—or before the Communications Revolution anyway—for rural Americans to learn of presidential election results, or news of disasters, or financial panics weeks after they happened; and this was true well into the 1830s for some people.

But before we get to the key technological innovations that triggered the Communication Revolution, we should pause to point out that the United States was uniquely prepared at this point in history to make the most of it, and that's because of two factors: The first preexisting factor was widespread literacy; in fact, by almost any measure, the United States was the most literate society in the world in 1830. For white adults, the rate of literacy exceeded 90 percent. Why was this so? This remarkable fact was due to a number of things: One was the fact that the Protestant religious tradition that

characterized much of early American development in the colonial period placed great emphasis on the need for all true Christians to read the Bible. In isolated farmsteads, much of this teaching was done by the mother in the household. If you lived in a town in colonial America or in the early republic, citizens often sponsored what they called “common schools,” and here children would learn the rudimentary things that we’d call the “three R’s,” reading, writing, and arithmetic. These are not the public schools that would eventually come online; these were schools that operated just a couple weeks of the year, they’re often staffed by marginally-educated adults and sometimes even teenagers, not the “public schools” that we’ll start to see emerging in the 1830s. But they accomplished their basic goal, which was to create a nation of readers. Now all they needed—all these Americans who could read needed—was something to read.

The second key factor that pre-existed the Communication Revolution was the United States Post Office. The U.S. Post Office is not the most exciting institution, I can admit, but it plays a key role here. The Constitution, of course, calls for the creation of a federal postal system; and so before the Civil War, the largest government agency in the federal government was the Post Office. In fact, delivering the mail was really the number one job of the federal government. If you think about this—let me give you a number here—in the 1820s, there were more postal employees than all the other agencies of the federal bureaucracy combined. Or, another way to look at it: There were more post office employees than soldiers and sailors in the United States military. That gives you an idea of how big the Post Office was relative to anything else. In the antebellum period, this post office system was expanding like a web, spreading out throughout the country. Between 1815 and 1830, the number of post offices in the United States grew from 3,000 to 8,000, and most of these post offices were located in small towns and were managed by part-time postmasters. This was a system that was far more extensive than any that was found anywhere in the world, including Europe; and this fact drew the attention of the Europeans when they visited. Remember, Alexis de Tocqueville came in the 1830s and wrote a book about America, and he really thought the American postal system was quite extraordinary; he called it the “great link between the minds” that spread out into “the heart of the wilderness.”

No mail was delivered to homes in those days; citizens were required to pick up their mail at the local post office. So naturally post offices became great gathering places for the exchange of news, information, and gossip; and, in fact, many post offices were located in small homes and shops where the postmaster was on hand and could also sell alcohol and food. In antebellum America, many Americans had several good reasons to go to the post office, not only to pick up the mail but maybe to have a sip of some good whiskey. The majority of mail carried by the postal service was printed matter: mainly newspapers and magazines, and not personal letters. The American postal service was not only more extensive than those in Europe, but it was also more democratic. In European countries, they treated their postal service as a source of revenue for the government, so they charged very high postal rates. In the United States, the postal service was considered a government service for all, so the government kept the rates very, very low. When the Communication Revolution began to generate unprecedented amounts of information, the nation already had in place a vast and inexpensive distribution system to circulate all of this information.

Now, let's turn to the third element of this lecture: the key technological innovations that sparked the Communication Revolution. The first was the steam-powered printing press. Everybody knows that the German Johannes Gutenberg was the first who invented the printing press; that was way back in 1440. But that device had changed very little over the centuries—essentially a hand-operated machine allowing you to print a couple of pages at a time—so it was still fairly slow in terms of generating printed matter. But it was another German, a man named Friedrich Koenig, who in 1811 produced the first steam-powered printing press. The first of these steam-powered printing presses was ordered by an American newspaper, the *New York Daily Advertiser*, and it was delivered to New York in 1825. It was soon churning out what at the time was a mindboggling volume: 2,000 copies of their newspaper per hour.

By this time, the rapid printing press process was also helped along by another invention. In 1816, a guy named Thomas Gilpin in Pennsylvania invented a machine that produced paper on a continuous roll that could be fed into a printing press. You can see how these technologies are starting to come together, all leading to one thing: an ability to generate tons of

printed matter. The next step occurred in 1847. An American inventor named Richard March Hoe patented a lithographic rotary printing press that put type on a revolving cylinder, and this allowed the churning out of printed matter at a much faster rate than the old flatbed printing press. These inventions—think about it this way—effectively industrialized printing; they led to an explosion in the number and variety of newspapers, magazines, and books. We'll just take one example: In New York City, between 1832 and 1836, when all of these technologies are coming together, the combined circulation of the city's daily newspapers grew by fourfold, up to 60,000.

The low cost of newspaper production led to the invention pretty quickly of what they called the “penny press.” Up to this point, most newspapers were commercial—they only handled commercial business—and they also only came out once a week. The *New York Sun* changed all that. They introduced a daily newspaper that was filled with everything they could get their hands on—human interest stories, especially stuff that got people's attention: crime, scandal, sex—and they only sold it for a penny; and they sold copies also on the street, rather than just to special subscribers. The *New York Sun* turned out to be a huge success; and, of course, everybody always imitates successors. If you know another well-known, longstanding American newspaper: the *New Orleans Picayune*? That name comes from the Creole word for “penny”; so it's part of this penny press revolution.

The advent of the penny press signaled a major change in American journalism, because before 1820 most newspapers were commercial papers; they filled their pages with advertising and any news that they included was basically business news. But starting in the 1820s, publishers began to include more news related to politics; and indeed, political parties soon started to establish their own newspapers, or they subsidized existing newspapers as long as they could get favorable coverage. But over time, especially with the advent of the penny press, editors began to publish more and more local news and, of course, more sensational news, as we mentioned: scandal, corruption, disasters; the stuff that sells newspapers. Isn't it comforting to see that the media in the 1820s and 1830s was little better than the media in our time, basically specializing in sensation?

What made this quest for engaging news increasingly possible was the second key innovation of the Communication Revolution: the telegraph. Before we go any further, it's really important to properly reorient our thinking about the telegraph because in the 21st century, a lot of people think of the telegraph as something quite ancient; really something only, technologically speaking, a little bit, maybe one notch, above two cans and a string. But in the 19th century, the telegraph was the Internet times 10; in fact, you can even argue it was the Internet times 100. Think about that: The Internet, as wondrous and world-changing as it's been, is just an extension of existing technologies like the telephone, the radio, the television, and the personal computer; so there's precedent for the Internet, we can see it as a progression. The telegraph had no precedent whatsoever. Suddenly, for the first time in human history, people could receive and send information over vast distances, and they could do it instantly. The telegraph literally changed the world.

So who invented it? Like every breakthrough, every invention you've ever heard of—the telephone, the light bulb, the automobile—there were many, many people working to invent the telegraph. But in the United States, it was a man named Samuel F. B. Morse, who was a writer, a very successful painter, and a tinkerer, and he's the guy who invented the first successful single wire telegraph system. It was said that his inspiration came from a personal tragedy. He was, as I said, a wonderfully accomplished artist, and he was commissioned to paint a portrait of the famed Marquis de Lafayette who came back to the United States in the mid-1820s on a kind of a farewell tour. So Morse went to New York to paint the portrait, and in the middle of painting the portrait he received a letter from his father in Connecticut telling him that his wife was very sick. Morse immediately headed for Connecticut—not that far away—but by the time he arrived there, his wife had already died and already been buried, and he was devastated by the fact that she had died without him there at her side and he apparently vowed that he would somehow find a way to improve the speed of communication.

Seven years later, Samuel F.B. Morse was on a voyage across the Atlantic Ocean from Europe to the United States, and he met a man named Charles Thomas Jackson, who was a leading expert in what was called electromagnetism. To pass the time on the ocean voyage, Jackson made some

demonstrations of electromagnetism to Morse, who had a scientific mind and was very curious; and it set Morse to thinking: How could such a force be harnessed to transmit messages through wires over long distances? To make a long story short, Morse soon developed (once he got home) just such a device. There were several other competing telegraph models out there, in England and Germany in particular; but Morse's was a superior model because it was simpler to use: It only used one wire to send and receive messages. By 1837, Morse had perfected his telegraph to the point where it could send and receive messages over 10 miles of wire—so he's really getting close to a breakthrough here—and he also by this time had taken on two business partners.

By 1840, Morse had been able to demonstrate his telegraph to a few members of Congress; he'd also received a patent for his design; and he'd developed a simple and effective code of dots and dashes that would bear his name. I bet almost everybody around here knows the Morse code for S.O.S. Three years later, in March, 1843, Morse and his partners received their biggest break yet. Congress voted to appropriate \$30,000—which we should point out was a huge sum of money—to Morse so he could build an experimental 38-mile telegraph line from Washington, D.C. to Baltimore, Maryland.

A little more than a year later, on May 24, 1844, Morse and his associates gathered in the chambers of the United States Supreme Court in the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. With this captive audience of extremely powerful men watching, Morse tapped out the first official message on a telegraph in United States history. He chose the phrase: He tapped out, "What hath God wrought"; and this phrase was a very apt one because it came from the Bible from the book of Numbers, and it neatly captured the sense that something of extraordinary magnitude had just occurred and was about to unfold once this telegraph became more popularized. Moments later, Morse got a reply from 38 miles away in Baltimore, and the dawning of a new era of instantaneous, long-distance communication was born.

The astonishing impact of the telegraph was about to be felt by the American public and pretty quickly. People were truly amazed by what they saw, and people commented on it because, again, there's no precedent for the telegraph as opposed to some of these other technologies we've been talking

about; the idea that you can send a message 100, 1,000 miles and get an answer almost instantly. One New Orleans newspaper edited and kind of captured that sentiment by saying, “Scarcely anything now will appear to be impossible.” Only three days after Morse showed his telegraph, he seized an opportunity to demonstrate the practical utility of the telegraph by receiving instant updates from the doings at the Democratic National Convention, which just happened to be meeting in Baltimore where the other end of his telegraph line was. Washington, D.C. quickly learned via the telegraph only moments after it occurred that the Democratic Party had nominated a largely unknown man—the first dark horse presidential candidate in American history—James K. Polk; we’ll be hearing a lot about him in a subsequent lecture.

With this auspicious start, the telegraph system grew rapidly, with Morse’s company out in the lead (so he’s going to make a lot of money on this enterprise). The majority of early telegraph messages—about 70 percent of them by one measure—by the early 1850s were commercial in nature. Just as in our day, investors, what do they want? They want instant information. They want information about stock and commodities prices in real time. They want to know about interest rates, whether they’re going up or down; they want to hear about big business deals; they want to hear about crop forecasts. What if there’s a freeze in the wheat crop in Kansas? They want to know now, so they can change their investing strategy. Think of the advantage gained by an investor who learns this kind of information. Business people also turned to the telegraph to send inquiries about a person’s creditworthiness. If a person from Kansas City shows up in New York and wants a loan, how will they know? They can now wire Kansas City and get information about this guy. As a result, the earliest lines in this telegraph network were strung between commercial centers, not surprisingly; between New York, Philadelphia and Boston. One Philadelphia commercial newspaper said, “The markets will no longer be dependent upon the snail paced mails.” See, people were complaining about “snail mail” way back then.

The construction of the telegraph network was boosted by the war between the United States and Mexico. At the start of the war in 1846, the national network had just totaled—it was only two years old—146 miles. But the demand from newspapers for instant updates on the war’s progress spurred

rapid construction; and in just a few years, 1850, the system covered 10,000 miles (it shows you how fast you can string those wires). This enormous impact of this new reality is conveyed in a famous painting from this period, from 1850; a painting by an artist named Richard C. Woodville. You probably have seen this image, maybe in a textbook; it's called "War News from Mexico." It shows a cluster of men on sort of a front porch of a little post office, and they're gathered around a man holding a newspaper and many of them have shocked looks on their faces, and you can tell from the headlines on the paper that this is news from the war in Mexico.

One additional point that needs to be made about the innovations and inventions that spurred the Communication Revolution was that many of them were, of course, part of the Transportation Revolution. Canals, steamboats, and railroads—those things we talked about earlier—were built primarily to carry goods and people. But they also carried the mail, and they helped speed the delivery of newspapers and magazines to an ever-expanding republic; and as I mentioned earlier, wherever you saw railroad tracks, you always saw telegraph lines running right alongside of them, and same with canals.

In the time that we have left, let's turn to this lecture's final segment: examining the profound impact—the social, economic, and political impact—of the Communication Revolution. First, let's look at the economic impact: The Communication Revolution began to knit together the country's economy by connecting businessmen in what had been before isolated commercial centers with each other; and in many cases, they did so faster than the railroad. New York City, for example, was connected to New Orleans by telegraph in 1848, well before these two cities were connected by the railroad. What's the impact of this on business? The impact on business is remarkable: We already mentioned that you could now conduct business over great distances; businesses were able to check into the creditworthiness of clients; they were able to get early information; so the impact was quite astonishing. Think about another expression that we're very used to business-wise: that you can now "wire money." How does that happen that you can "wire money?" That comes from the telegraph and the fact that business centers, banks and financial institutions can talk to each other.

A second impact of the Communication Revolution was its enormous social impact. The massive increase in available information through the spread of newspapers and magazines led to the development of a national culture where people had shared interests and tastes, no matter what part of the country you were in; essentially, we're talking about the ending of all that isolation that I mentioned at the early part of the lecture. Middle-class women all across the United States, for example, began to read the same magazines; magazines that were aimed specifically at them. It's there that there they learned about the latest fashions and latest trends. They also learned of an ever-growing amount of advice about how to rear children, how to please their husbands, how to maintain a happy and holy household. Historians refer to these things as the "reification," if you will, the celebration of domestic life; and this is a product of the Industrial Revolution, which we'll talk about in a different lecture. But it created kind of an understanding among the middle class women about their proper role in society. How did 19th-century middle class women learn that their proper place was not in the workplace but in the home? They learned through these cultural devices, these magazines, brought to them by the Communication Revolution.

I'll give you another example; another example of the social impact: When did Americans start putting Christmas trees in their homes at Christmastime? It started in the middle 1850s, and it started when a popular women's magazine published a drawing of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert decorating a Christmas tree. Albert was of German background, so this was a custom in Germany that he brought to England. It was captured in this drawing and then transmitted to the United States and then republished there. Almost instantly, Americans took a fancy to this idea and began cutting down trees, hauling them inside for decorating, and then placing gifts underneath. We've been doing it ever since, and it's a product of the Communication Revolution.

Another social impact: the spread of popular music. How did you spread popular music in the 19th century before you could record music? It was done through sheet music; and, of course, sheet music is generated off of steam powered printing presses. The popular songwriters of the day: Probably the most popular songwriter in mid-19th-century America was a guy named Stephen Foster, and he wrote hit song after hit song—"The Camptown

Races,” “O Susanna, “My Old Kentucky Home”—a long list of hits, and he made a lot of money. But guess what he complained about? He complained about piracy. Piracy—stealing of music—is not a modern day thing with the digital age, it was a problem back in the 19th century; what he was mad about was that people were copying the sheet music that they were buying and getting bootleg copies of his music.

Another social impact was popular imagery. This was in the days, of course, before television and before radio, so how did people see what’s going on in their country? One company figured out that they could make a ton of money if they could help America see things. This company was—you probably know the name—Currier and Ives. They were engravers, and they began in the 1840s to essentially draw images for America: presidential inaugurations, steamboat disasters, images of firemen, during the Civil War all kinds of battle imagery was generated; anything that happened in America or any idea in America—like a beautiful Christmas scene or a beautiful rural scene—Currier and Ives generated these images by the thousands and then sold them to a ravenous American public that couldn’t get enough of them; people would tack these up in their room. In the 19th century, young boys, for example, didn’t have posters of great basketball players or football players; they had Currier and Ives images of the heroes of the day, which were firemen or soldiers.

The Communication Revolution’s social impact was also evident in the role in popularizing evangelical Christianity that was inspired by the Second Great Awakening, something we’ve already talked about, as well as the many reform movements that the Second Great Awakening inspired. How did these movements—abolition, temperance, women’s rights and so many others—gain a mass following? It’s largely due to the fact that these movements figure out that they need to generate tons and tons of information, and they need to get it out to the public. The abolitionist movement, for example, began to generate newspapers—we actually established the start of the modern abolitionist movement with the 1831 founding of William Lloyd Garrison’s newspaper, *The Liberator*—and then there were lots and lots of other ones as well that were published. Frederick Douglass, another great abolitionist, how did we find out about him? He started writing for

newspapers and then eventually published his own autobiography, one of the first big bestsellers in mid-19th century America.

Another element of the abolitionist movement was linked to this Communication Revolution: How did Americans get those 300,000 copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that were sold in the first year that it went on sale? From these steam powered printing presses, and from newspapers and magazines that advertised this novel; and, in fact, the novel first appeared in a serialized form in a newspaper and then was turned into a book. Abolitionists, of course, also generated images. They knew the power of images just like Currier and Ives, but in this case they're doing it for a social purpose; for a political purpose. They realized that the power of images to get their message across, you almost couldn't measure it; so with the abolitionists, they frequently would publish, many of these images you've seen (a couple of them), one of them being a slave ship, that diagram of a slave ship. There are no words to go with that; it shows a kind of diagram of a ship—the slave ship *Brooks*, actually, it's a British slave ship—and it shows human beings lined up, shoulder to shoulder, all throughout the decks of the ship. They republished this over and over again in their literature to emphasize the inhumanity of slavery and of the slave trade. They also published lots of images of slaves being whipped, and also another favorite one that really pulled the humanitarian heartstrings: images of slave auctions; images of mothers being separated from their children. These images were printed up and distributed en masse across the United States.

Some evangelicals recognized the potential for the telegraph to redeem the world. This may sound fanciful, but just listen to the words of one Methodist women's magazine talking about the potential for the telegraph to really transform the world and Christianize the world. Let's listen to what they had to say:

This noble invention is to be the means of extending civilization, republicanism, and Christianity over the earth. It must and will be extended to nations half-civilized, and thence to those now savage and barbarous. Our government will be the grand center of this mighty influence ... The beneficial and harmonious operation of our institutions will be seen, and similar ones adopted. Christianity

must speedily follow them, and we shall behold the grand spectacle of a whole world, civilized, republican, and Christian. . . . Wars will cease from the earth. . . . Then shall come to pass the millennium.

They're saying that the telegraph is going to change world history and bring on the second coming of Christ. That's a pretty tall order, but that gives you an idea of the enthusiasm that some people had when they thought about how this device was going to change their world.

The third impact of the Communication Revolution was the way that it reshaped democratic politics by making possible the rise of modern political parties. You may recall in our earlier lecture about the Election of 1800: that after the Revolution most Americans agreed that political parties were evil; that they threatened the health and stability of society. But it didn't take very long: Over time, the idea of political parties began to gain legitimacy after the Election of 1800. By the 1820s, as we discussed in our lecture about the spread of universal suffrage, most white men now had the right to vote; so for a political party to be effective, it had to find ways to reach a large mass of people in a country that's expanding. Political leaders learned pretty quickly that the most effective way to shape public opinion and to gain a loyal following politically speaking was through the press. The advent of the Communication Revolution at this very moment provided political leaders with the tools they needed to spread the gospel of the Democratic Party or the gospel of the Whig Party to the masses.

One way to remember this is to think about the great expressions, the campaign slogans, which emerged in this time period; I'll just mention a couple: "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too"; that's a phrase that doesn't make any sense to us now, but at the time it was generated and spread to the masses through communication. "Honest Abe"—that whole image of Honest Abe—was another one. With the Communication Revolution, presidential candidates began to publish campaign biographies; and just as a reflection of the times, they not only published—these were mostly little pamphlets telling you who Honest Abe was, for example, or who Zachary Taylor was—but they actually often would print two of them, one for the North and one for the South, emphasizing different aspects of their background.

We could go on, but I think we better not. It's pretty clear (I hope) that the Communication Revolution was a major turning point in American History. In our next lecture, we'll change things up a bit and begin to look at the invention of baseball as a major turning point in American history, but of a different sort. Thank you.

1845 The Ultimate American Game—Baseball

Lecture 19

Baseball was created in 1845 by Alexander Cartwright and the members of his New York Knickerbocker Base Ball Club. Thirteen years later, the National Association of Base Ball Players was formed. Baseball grew increasingly popular during and after the Civil War. Although baseball now competes with basketball and football for the affections of the American public, it enjoyed a 100-plus-year run as the dominant spectator sport in the nation. In the process, it both reflected and shaped American culture.

The fame of “Casey at the Bat” by Ernest L. Thayer demonstrates just how much baseball is a part of American culture. The story has been turned into a silent film and an opera; Casey’s image has adorned a postage stamp. The fictional Casey even has a place in the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Mountains of books have been written on baseball, some containing evidence of baseball-like games dating back to the 14th century. The first published mention of baseball in America dates from 1791. By the 1830s, many bat-and-ball games were being played throughout the United States, with rules that varied from region to region.

These games were especially popular in New York City, and in 1845 the game as we know it—called the New York game—was created by Alexander Cartwright, a Manhattan bookseller and volunteer fire fighter at the Knickerbocker Fire Engine Company. The first officially recorded baseball game under Cartwright’s rules occurred on June 19, 1846, in Hoboken, New Jersey. Cartwright’s team lost 23 to 1.

By the mid-1850s, journalists were referring to baseball as the “national pastime.” Henry Chadwick, an English-born baseball player and journalist, invented the box score and the emphasis on statistics. The Civil War was crucial to the spread of the New York game as a leisure activity in both Union and Confederate camps, thanks to its relative simplicity and speed.

Contrary to legend, Union Army officer Abner Doubleday had no role in the invention of baseball. He was linked to the story 12 years after his death by Albert Spalding, former player and founder of the Spalding sporting goods company, who was determined to prove that baseball was an American game with American roots.

After the war, entrepreneurs realized large crowds would pay to see games—and would pay for beer and food as well. In 1869, the Cincinnati Red Stockings was formed as the first professional baseball team. In 1871, a would-be professional league, the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players, was formed, replaced in 1876 by the National League. Several rival leagues formed and folded over the next few decades.

Moses Fleetwood Walker became the first black professional baseball player in 1884. But racist attitudes against African Americans were on the rise, and black players faced hostility from fans, rival teams, and even their own teammates. By 1890, the National League team owners had a gentleman's agreement to no longer field black players. That unofficial rule would last until 1947, the year Jackie Robinson broke the "color line." Meanwhile, African Americans formed what became known as Negro leagues.

In 1901, a new American League formed, and in 1903, American League Boston Pilgrims (forerunners of the Red Sox) defeated the National League Pittsburgh Pirates in the first World Series.

What makes baseball unique—and uniquely American? First, it is the only major team sport where players perform as individuals. Americans cherish teamwork but also individual achievement. Second, as a game born of the



Henry Chadwick invented baseball's box score system still in use today.

Library of Congress

Industrial Revolution, no sport is so well designed for statistics and analysis. Just as factory owners wanted to measure the productivity of their workers, America's baseball fans sought ways to discover which players were performing at the highest level (and should therefore be paid the most).

Baseball is also the only major sport that has no clock, meaning you need to play to the very last pitch. Some of the greatest moments in baseball history have involved late-inning comebacks, appealing to America's love of the underdog. Finally, baseball went from a popular amateur game to a professional business enterprise in just a few years. In fact, almost every aspect of the business of modern sports was pioneered by baseball.

Consider all the phrases and expressions in American slang that come directly from baseball: big league, cover all the bases, and play hardball, just to name a few. From film to music to literature, baseball pervades American pop culture like no other sport. ■

Suggested Reading

Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It*.

Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*.

Levine, *A. G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*.

Questions to Consider

1. Does it matter that baseball was not entirely invented in America but rather had its origins in Europe?
2. Is baseball really the ultimate American game? Does it contain certain quintessentially American characteristics?

1845 The Ultimate American Game—Baseball

Lecture 19—Transcript

Welcome back. It's time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Today, we look at the origins of the ultimate American sport: baseball. Let's start with a question: Can any of you think of a poem—even just the title of a poem—about football, hockey, basketball, tennis, NASCAR? I didn't think so. But let me ask you another question: Can any of you think of a poem about baseball? Can you recite a few lines from this poem? I'm willing to bet that a good number of you can, and I'm willing to bet further that most of you came up with "Casey at the Bat." This immortal poem about the fictional slugger named Casey of the Mudville nine first appeared in the *San Francisco Examiner* on June 3, 1888 and it was written by a man named Ernest L. Thayer, a Harvard graduate from Massachusetts. Let's listen to how this famous poem begins:

The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day;
The score stood four to two with but one inning more to play;
And then, when Cooney died at first, and Barrows did the same,
A pall-like silence fell upon the patrons of the game.

The poem goes on from there: A little bit further in, of course, up to the plate strides the mighty Casey, and he cavalierly takes two strikes and then digs in with ferocious intensity. Everybody thinks, of course, he's going to hit a home run; but, alas, it was not meant to be, as the poem's famous final lines relate:

Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is shining bright;
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light,
And somewhere men are laughing, and little children shout;
But there is no joy in Mudville—mighty Casey has struck out.

No one can count how many times this poem has been reprinted or recited. It's most famous performer, a stage actor named DeWitt Hopper, recited it more than 10,000 times in his career. The poem "Casey" has been turned into a silent film, into an opera; and the image of Casey adorned a special

stamp from the U.S. Postal Service in 1996. If you head to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, you'll see a statue of the mighty Casey.

All this fuss about a fictional baseball player gives us an insight into the prominence of baseball in American history; but before we go any further into this fun and yet pretty significant story about the birth of baseball, let's set out our objectives for this lecture. We'll focus on four things: First, we'll look at the origins of baseball; a story, by the way, that has nothing to do with anybody named Doubleday. Then from there we'll examine how the Civil War played a key role in the emergence of baseball, and then after the Civil War how baseball emerged as the first big-time professional sports enterprise. Then we'll pause to consider just what it is about baseball that makes it the ultimate American game. Finally, we'll examine the many, many ways in which baseball has both reflected and shaped American culture.

Ok, let's get started by tracing the origins of baseball. One of the clearest indications of the important place of baseball in American life is the mountain of books and articles written on the subject of the game's origins. Some of this research has turned up some fascinating examples of the games that go way back in time that resemble baseball from hundreds of years ago. For example, some cite a French manuscript dated in the year 1344 that has an image of monks and nuns playing a game using a ball and a stick; so who knows how much of that has to do with baseball, but it certainly is intriguing. About the same time in the 14th century, people in southern England were also playing a game involving a stick and ball and it was called "stoolball," and there was also a later game called "tut-ball"; and both of these are probably the ancestors of the English games of rounders, cricket, and ultimately of baseball.

The first verifiable reference to something called "baseball" was published in England in 1744. It was a short poem that described something called "baseball" and it was accompanied with a woodcut image of a triangular field with posts instead of bases; so we're getting a little bit closer to what we would see as baseball. Eleven years later, in 1755, an English lawyer in his diary described a game of baseball; so we have a couple printed references to it. We know that people in England are playing something called "baseball," and these English people began to come to North America and they brought

this game with them. The first published mention of baseball in America dates from 1791 in the town of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. The town passed a law banning baseball from being played near their now town meeting house; they probably didn't want kids smashing the windows with line drives. By the 1830s, records show that there were many bat and ball games being played throughout the United States. Some people called it "baseball," others called it "rounders," some called it "town ball"; and because there were no firm rules, the game varied by region. In some places, for example, a side was retired after just one out; elsewhere, the rules gave a team three outs. A similar variation existed when it came to the number of balls and strikes, or the distance between bases, or how an out was recorded: A lot of places, you were allowed to record an out by catching the ball on one bounce.

One of the places where baseball was especially popular was New York City; and, in fact, much of American baseball was actually born in cities. We think of it as a rural game, but it's actually an urban game. It was in New York City in 1845 that baseball as we know it today was born—at least its key first step—and the father of this game was a man named Alexander Cartwright. In 1845, Cartwright was a 25 year old man living in Manhattan, and he earned his living as a bookseller and also as a shipping clerk; so he's pretty much an everyday guy. Like many people in that era, he was a member of a volunteer fire company; this one was called the Knickerbocker Fire Engine Company. In the early 1840s, Cartwright and several of his fellow firemen formed a baseball team that they called the Knickerbockers, and they played their games against teams in the New York/New Jersey area.

By 1845—perhaps because they were frustrated to find that when they would show up and play teams the teams had different sets of rules—Cartwright and a couple of his friends on the team drew up and published the first clear set of rules for the game of baseball, and one of the most important rules that they came up with was the barring of what was called "plugging"; that is, that you could record an out by fielding a ground ball and throwing it and hitting the runner on his way to first base. Needless to say, this rule lowered the number of incidents of fighting associated with the game, but it also allowed for the use of a smaller and harder ball that could be hit further and speed the game up. Cartwright's new code also established foul lines and a diamond-shaped field. But the rules also allowed some of the old holdover

rules: You still were allowed to record an out by fielding the ball on a bounce and recording an out. They also only permitted underhanded pitching. The first recorded game under these new rules occurred on June 19, 1846, in Hoboken, New Jersey. There may have been other games; this is the one we know about. It was a contest featuring a team called the New York Baseball Club against Cartwright's team, the Knickerbockers. Cartwright may have written the rules of baseball, but his team got creamed that day, 23 to 1 in just four innings.

Over the next 15 years, baseball grew in popularity throughout the northeast, especially the version established by Cartwright that many people just simply called the "New York game," and they did so because there was another game, there was a game called the "Massachusetts game" that was popular in the Boston area. By the mid-1850s, journalists had begun to refer to baseball as the "national game," and even using that now-familiar phrase the "national pastime." Walt Whitman was one of these early figures; Walt Whitman, the great writer and poet, picked up on this popularity of baseball and he loved it. He said, "I see great things in baseball. It's our game - the American game. It will take our people out-of-doors, fill them with oxygen, give them a larger physical stoicism. Tend to relieve us from being a nervous, dyspeptic set. Repair these losses, and be a blessing to us."

Another measure of baseball's growing popularity was the fact that political cartoonists began to use baseball to depict election results. One of the earliest comes from 1860—you may have seen this one before—it's titled "The National Game: Three Outs and One Run," and it shows Abraham Lincoln holding a bat and ball while he taunts his defeated rivals, the men he defeated in the election of 1860. Journalism played a key role in popularizing baseball; and one journalist in particular played a formidable role, and his name was Henry Chadwick. Chadwick was actually English—he grew up in England; he grew up a great player of cricket—but then he emigrated to America and quickly became a very successful baseball player, and then a baseball journalist. He made many contributions to early baseball, but clearly his most important one was that he invented the box score and eventually statistics like batting averages; so this allowed for a codification, a simple collection of what happened in a game in a single table. What Chadwick and others liked about the box score was how it provided concrete evidence of a

player's value to the team; you can actually break it down into numbers, and we'll talk about this in a little bit.

With the popularity of baseball came important rule changes. By the 1860s, bases were fixed at 90 feet apart; they began to require umpires; catching a ball on one bounce no longer counted as an out; and eventually overhanded pitching was allowed. In 1863, the first stolen base occurred, and people accepted it as a feature of the game. There was one rule, though, about which Cartwright and others were adamant: They said one thing we just can't bend on is that baseball had to be an amateur sport; no professionalism. This rule would prove ultimately impossible to uphold in coming years, and so would rules prohibiting swearing, spitting, and gambling. But these rules—these attempted rules—reflected an early notion that baseball was a gentleman's game. Not a gentleman in the sense of wealth, but rather in demeanor, in manners; it was a game for decent men, decent people.

This explains the concern—kind of a funny concern—that greeted the debut of the curveball in 1867. When somebody figured out how to make a ball curve, people immediately asked “Is this cheating?” Some people said, “Of course it's cheating, you're trying to deceive the batter.” In a great letter written by the president of Harvard University, Charles Eliot, when he learned that the team had won a championship and he said I'd learned “because we have a pitcher who has a fine curve ball.” He went on his letter to say, “I am further instructed that the purpose of the curve ball is to deliberately deceive the batter. Harvard is not in the business of teaching deception.” Eliot was a little distressed about this; I think he eventually got over it.

Critical to the spread of the popularity of the New York game was the Civil War. In both the North and South, the war brought together hundreds of thousands of young men from every corner of the nation; and since even in the midst of great military campaigns soldiers often find themselves with lots of time on their hands, baseball became one of the principle leisure activities in both Union and Confederate camps. One of the aspects of baseball that helped boost its popularity among soldiers was its simplicity, and its speed relative to cricket (now, many people don't think of baseball as fast today, but relative to cricket it's fast; and cricket was still very popular in the

1860s). The popularity of baseball during the war was captured in a letter written by Private Alpheris B. Parker of the 10th Massachusetts regiment, and he wrote on April 21, 1863—so right in the middle of the war—“The parade ground has been a busy place for a week or so past, ball-playing having become a mania in camp. Officer and men forget, for a time, the differences in rank and indulge in the invigorating sport with a school boy’s ardor.” By the end of the war, baseball was well on its way to becoming the nation’s most popular sport.

So, you may be asking, where does Abner Doubleday figure into this? Abner Doubleday, the man, had absolutely no role whatsoever to do with baseball. What we know about Doubleday was that he was a Union Army general during the war; he fought bravely in several key battles during the Civil War; and he later went on to become a successful businessman. His only connection to baseball that we know of happened 12 years after his death; he died in 1893. How did this happen? Around 1900, Albert Spalding—who was a former player and by that point was a multimillionaire sporting equipment company magnate—became irked because he kept hearing people suggesting that baseball had descended from the English games of cricket and rounders; and so he became determined, regardless of the facts, to show that the great American game was of American origin. He formed a commission of men who felt the same way he did, and they began to investigate. When people learned of this investigation they began to send information to the commission, and one letter came in from a man—who turned out to be somewhat deranged—who said that he had witnessed way back in 1839 Abner Doubleday at the end of a game write down the rules of baseball. That was all the Spalding Commission needed; they declared that baseball was an American game and that its father was Abner Doubleday.

There were skeptics from the start over this creation myth, and over the next few decades they showed conclusively that Doubleday and the story of his founding baseball was a total myth. But that, of course, didn’t stop the entrepreneurs, particularly the entrepreneurs in Doubleday’s hometown of Cooperstown, New York. They were eager to turn that place into a tourism destination, so they opened baseball’s hall of fame there in 1939 on the centennial of the fictional origin story. Eventually people cleared this up, and

Congress even set the record straight in 1953 when they passed an official resolution declaring Alexander Cartwright the “father of baseball.”

Now that we’ve seen baseball invented (and not invented), let’s turn to examine how after the Civil War baseball emerged as the first big-time professional sports enterprise. With baseball’s growing popularity, it was only a matter of time before professionalism began to creep in, even though people resisted it. At first, some teams professionalized only partially—they paid a star or two that were their key players maybe a little bit of money—but mostly the game remained amateur. But entrepreneurs had come to realize that large crowds would pay good money to see baseball games, and they’d also pay for food and drink; and so the professionalism began to creep in. In 1869, the Cincinnati Red Stockings was formed as the first fully professional baseball team. In those days there was no league for them to play in, so they basically were a barnstorming team: They traveled all around the country, taking on anybody—amateur, semipro teams and the like—and defeated most of them, and they got a lot of publicity for this. Many more teams followed their example, and in 1871 an early professional baseball league, the National Association of Professional Baseball Players, was formed. It only lasted four years before it was replaced in 1876 by the first true professional baseball league, the National League (the National League we have today). That’s why the National League, incidentally, is called—its nickname is—the Senior Circuit, because it’s the senior of the two leagues relative to the American League. The National League featured eight charter member teams in 1876, and these included some teams that are long gone, but also the Cincinnati Red Stockings and the Philadelphia Athletics.

Several rival professional leagues formed and folded over the next few decades, and one of them—the American Baseball Association—was founded in 1882. It tried to distinguish itself from the National League by doing a number of things: For example, they played games on Sundays, which most teams didn’t do. They also sold beer at their parks, which was certainly something to attract more people. They also allowed African American players; people like Moses Fleetwood Walker, who played catcher for the Toledo Bluestockings. But baseball, as sports so often do, reflected the times; and as we’ll see in an upcoming lecture on the end of Reconstruction and the establishment of Jim Crow discrimination in the late

19th and early 20th century, racist attitudes against African Americans were on the rise in the 1880s and the 1890s. Fleet Walker, as he was known, faced incredible racism during his time in the major leagues, a lot of it coming from his own teammates. One of his own pitchers—remember he played catcher—on the Blue Socks ignored Walker’s pitching signs; he said, “I’m not going to take orders from a black man.” Walker faced hostility also from rival teams and their fans, and even towards the end of his career faced a lot of death threats. Despite this atmosphere—this hostile atmosphere—at least 50 African American players played professional baseball before 1890; and that was the year, in the face of rising hostility from some very prominent players like Cap Anson of the Chicago White Stockings, National League owners adopted a quiet “gentleman’s agreement” to no longer field black players.

That unofficial rule, the color line, would last until 1947, and that’s the year that Jackie Robinson broke the so-called color line and entered into Major League Baseball. Remember, you can always win a bet by asking, “Who was the first African-American to play in the Major Leagues?” because almost everyone will say “Jackie Robinson” and you can correct them, pointing out that it was Moses Fleetwood Walker; he was the first, back in 1884, before the color line had been drawn. After the color line was imposed, African Americans formed their own all-black teams and leagues, what eventually became known as the “Negro Leagues.” This meant, of course, that some of the greatest baseball players were never allowed to play Major League Baseball; or, like Jackie Robinson, they played most or a large chunk of their career in the Negro Leagues before finally being allowed into Major League Baseball. Thankfully, in recent years, Major League Baseball has gone to great lengths to rectify this situation and to honor these long-forgotten players; and many of them, in fact, have been inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

By the 1890s, the National League consisted of 12 teams, and it seemed destined to dominate baseball as a monopoly; but in 1901, a new league, the American League, was formed and it consisted of a number of former National League teams. Initially, the National League just sneered at this upstart league because they had seen many of them come and go, but very quickly the American League proved a worthy rival; and in 1903, just two

years later, the two rival leagues signed an agreement to respect each other as equal entities in Major League Baseball and to respect each other's players' contracts, so they wouldn't steal each other's players. More importantly, they agreed to send their respective champions—the American League champion and the National League champion—to something they called the “World Series.” That year, the Boston Pilgrims—sometimes called the Boston “Americans”; this is the forerunner of the Boston Red Sox—defeated the Pittsburgh Pirates to win the first World Series. The next year, Boston again won the AL pennant, but the National League winning team, the New York Giants, refused to play them in the World Series. That's because their cantankerous manager, John McGraw, had zero respect for the American League and he said, “We're the champions of the only real Major League.” Thankfully, the World Series resumed the next year and it's gone on ever since except for one year when there was a strike; and by then, Major League Baseball had assumed a central place in American culture.

With Major League Baseball now established, let's pause to consider just what it is about baseball that makes it the ultimate American game. In 1954, the famous cultural historian Jacques Barzun said, “Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball.” He's not alone; many other people made these kinds of observations that somehow baseball spoke to and explained America to people. What is it about baseball that makes it unique, and by extension what makes it uniquely American? Let's consider a number of distinct factors: First, baseball is unique among major team sports in that it's the only one where players perform as individuals. Every moment of every game is distinctly individual: The pitcher throws his pitch; then the batter tries to hit it. If he's successful, a fielder then tries to catch and throw the ball. Even in double plays, the pieces of a double play are distinctly individual acts. Many an observer of baseball has noted how this feature reflects a key aspect of American culture. Americans on the one hand revere group effort, community, and the common good; but Americans also prize rugged individualism. They cherish teamwork, but Americans also prize individual achievement. Baseball highlights both of these features.

Second, baseball stands alone as the greatest of quantifiable sports; and this characteristic reflects the aforementioned individual aspect of the sport. No sport generates more statistics than baseball, because no sport is so well

designed for finding statistics. Just think about the stats for batters, the basic ones: RBIs, batting average, slugging percentage, on-base percentage, home runs; not to mention singles, doubles, triples, walks, sacrifices, and that's just a handful of them. What about situational statistics? Hits with runners in scoring position; hits with runners in scoring position and two outs; hits with runners in scoring position with two outs and a lefty on the mound; hits with runners in scoring position with two outs and a lefty on the mound in day games versus night games. We could go on, right? Pitching: Same thing; it offers a similarly dizzying array of stats far beyond wins, losses, and ERA. As the writer Robert S. Weider once put it, "Baseball fans are junkies, and their heroin is the statistic." Other sports try to generate stats in a similar way, but there's a limit to how far they can go; it's just too hard to isolate individual performance. Think about football: The success of a quarterback is dependent on the blocking of his offensive line. It's also dependent on the ability of his receiver to get open, and then to catch the ball. Think about it: How do we evaluate quarterbacks? How many of us actually understand how a quarterback rating is calculated and what it actually tells us? I sure don't.

But our interest in statistics reflects more than baseball's individualistic character; it also reflects America's reverence of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution. It's no coincidence that baseball emerged as the nation's first big-time sport at the very time that America was entering the Industrial Age. Just as factory owners wanted to find ways to measure the productivity of their workers to see who was really getting the job done, America's baseball fans sought ways to sort through the day in and day out doings of their team to see what players were really performing at the highest level, which would, of course, determine how well they were paid. This is what Henry Chadwick—that Englishman who invented the box score—was onto when he invented it: It provided a clear way to measure performance.

There's one more thing about stats and the special place of baseball in American culture: More than any other major sport, baseball has changed very little since the early 20th century. Of course, lots of things have changed—baseball introduced a livelier ball in the 1920s to end the dead ball era, largely to generate more home runs; in recent decades we've seen domed stadiums, artificial turf, the designated hitter; so there have been some changes—but basically, the essentials of the game have changed very

little. I can compare Honus Wagner and Ty Cobb with Willie Mays and Ted Williams, and I can compare all of them to baseball's greats today, people like Albert Pujols or Derek Jeter. The same can't be said of the NFL or any of the other major sports. Think about that: Great NFL linebackers in the 1950s and 1960s weighed 190 pounds, and the best quarterbacks threw the ball 20, maybe 25, times a game. A good example would be Johnny Unitas: He was one of the greatest quarterbacks in NFL history, but his quarterback rating of 78.2 would be considered dismal by today's standards, it would keep him off the field; and so, too, would his lifetime completion percentage of 56.2 percent. But as they say, it was a different game back then. Baseball was different in earlier eras, but only by degrees. I have no doubt that Ty Cobb would hit well over .300 if he were alive today. I'm not so sure Frank Gifford would even be drafted, much less one of the NFL's leading running backs, if he was 22 years old today. Perhaps this notion was best summed up by the economist and baseball chronicler Lawrence Ritter when he wrote, "The strongest thing that baseball has going for it today is its yesterdays."

There's more to this: A third characteristic of baseball that makes it special, unique, and especially American is the fact that it's the only major sport that has no clock. On one level, given what I just said about the link between baseball and capitalism, you might think that the lack of a clock—the centerpiece of industrial life—actually undercuts that earlier claim; but baseball fans will make the case that the lack of a clock makes baseball the most competitive of all sports. How so? Let's leave it to the great manager of the Baltimore Orioles, Earl Weaver, to explain. He once said: "You can't sit on a lead and run a few plays into the line and just kill the clock. You've got to throw the ball over the goddamn plate and give the other man his chance. That's why baseball is the greatest game of them all." Nothing like Earl Weaver to say it straight. Or, as baseball's unofficial philosopher, Yogi Berra, liked to say, "It ain't over 'til it's over." Some of the greatest moments in baseball history, of course, have involved late-inning comebacks.

A fourth feature of baseball that makes it stand apart from other major sports is the fact that no two fields are the same. The dimensions of the infield, of course, are identical; but the distance and contours of the outfield fences vary widely, and so, too, does the amount of foul territory. All of these things really affect the way the game is played and the outcome of the game.

There's a fifth reason that makes baseball quintessentially American, and that is because it went from being invented as a popular amateur sport to a professional business enterprise in just a few years; and, in fact, almost every aspect of the business of modern sports was pioneered by baseball in the mid-19th century: linking sports to advertising, the advent of radio, television, expansion franchises, night games; you name it, it all began in the 19th century with Major League Baseball.

Finally, let's examine the many ways in which baseball has both reflected and shaped American culture. Consider all the phrases and expressions in the American language that come directly from baseball; and I'll just give you a couple of examples: "in the ballpark," or the phrase "ballpark figure." People refer to something as "big league," or if they don't like it, "bush league." If someone's in a good spot, they say "I'm in the catbird seat." People talk about "covering all the bases"; or that they were in a meeting and someone "threw them a curveball"; or that something is going beyond the expected amount of time, we're now in "extra innings"; or if you did a particularly great job on a test you "hit a home run" or you "knocked it out of the park," or if you really did well you "hit a grand slam." In politics, we talk about people "playing hardball" or refer to an expert or somebody who's going to get the job done as a "heavy-hitter." When we're in the 11th hour of a job or a situation, we sometimes say that we're "in the ninth inning"; or if there's a crazy idea out there we it "came out of left field" or it's "off-base"; or if you can't make a meeting or you can't be there to do something you ask somebody to "pinch hit" for you. If you watch political talk shows, sometimes people are criticized for throwing up "soft ball" questions. If you can't make an event, you sometimes say "I'll take a rain check"; or if somebody learns something quickly you say they got it "right off the bat." If somebody's a little weird, you say they're a "screwball." We talk about "stepping up to the plate"; we talk about "swinging for the fences." When we promise to contact somebody, we say we'll "touch base" with you; or if a situation has changed completely, we say "It's a whole new ballgame." All this comes from baseball, and I've only named a few of them. We also have great expressions in American language. Just to give you an example of one of them: "Say it ain't so." Most people know that it comes from the 1919 Black Sox scandal and Shoeless Joe Jackson. Or Yogi Berra's phrase, we just

mentioned it: “It ain’t over ‘til it’s over.” How many times have you heard that? There is no other sport that can claim such linguistic influence.

Baseball has also left its mark on popular culture. When *Time* magazine published one of the many “Greatest” lists for the 20th century, it ranked Abbott and Costello’s routine “Who’s On First?” the best comedy sketch of the 20th century. A few years ago, the American Film Institute published its list of “Top 10 Best Sports Films.” Two of those films were baseball movies, *Pride of the Yankees* and *Bull Durham*; and only the sport of boxing had two in that category. What about pop music? Can you think of a song about basketball, football, or hockey? I didn’t think so. But I’ll bet you all know the words to “Take Me Out to the Ballgame,” and you probably know a lot of the words to songs like John Fogerty’s “Center Field.” What about literature? We’ve already talked about “Casey at the Bat,” but there are endless volumes of poetry, some of it actually quite serious, devoted to baseball; and the same is true of short stories, novels, not to mention lots of serious nonfiction by great writers like Roger Kahn. His book, *The Boys of Summer*, is considered an American classic.

I think I’ve made my point: As much as Americans love football, basketball, and hockey—and I’m one of them—none of these sports have even a fraction of the impact on American life over the last 150 years compared to baseball. It’s true that other American sports like, for example, basketball have achieved global popularity, perhaps second only to soccer; and it’s true that in recent years more Americans say that football is their favorite spectator sport; but baseball in the early 21st century is as popular as it’s ever been, and it continues to hold a special place in the American imagination.

We’ll have to leave it there in this discussion of the origins of baseball. In our next lecture, we’ll examine the Mexican-American War and the Gold Rush. Until then, thank you.

1846 Land and Gold—The Mexican War

Lecture 20

Few events in American history have had as far-reaching an impact as the Mexican War, which brought California, New Mexico, Arizona, and parts of Texas, Utah, Colorado, and Nevada under United States control. But the war's real significance was its impact on the slavery debate—namely, whether slavery should be extended westward. California's population swelled after the gold strike of 1849, and the territory applied for statehood. This touched off a series of political disputes that brought on the Civil War.

Congress issued a formal declaration of war against Mexico on May 13, 1846. Americans' response was divided: Those in favor of the war were usually eager for America to acquire new territory. Those against it feared that new territory meant new battles in the old war over slavery.

Newspaper editor John L. O'Sullivan wrote in 1845 that it was America's "manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent." Manifest Destiny soon became a popular phrase to justify westward expansion.

Trouble had been brewing for years between the United States and Mexico, starting with the breakaway of the Republic of Texas. The Mexican government refused to recognize Texas as a nation and warned the United States that annexation of Texas would mean war. Nonetheless, nine years after gaining its independence, Texas was admitted to the Union.

Annexation immediately raised the question of the precise western boundary between Texas and Mexico. Texans had long claimed it was the Rio Grande River. Mexicans insisted that the boundary was the Nueces River, which would shrink Texas considerably.

President James K. Polk sent John Slidell on a secret mission to offer Mexico about \$25 million to purchase California, Arizona, and New Mexico, as well

as the territory between the Nueces and the Rio Grande. Mexico refused the offer, so Polk sent troops to the Rio Grande, hoping to either scare the Mexican government into selling the territories or to provoke them into a war they couldn't win. In the end, it was the latter.

Hostilities commenced on April 25, 1846, and war was officially declared on May 13. The delay reflected how deeply divided Congress and the American public were over a war with Mexico. Many Whigs and abolitionists opposed the war because they feared the newly acquired lands would promote the spread of slavery. But the Democratic Party, with its strong foundation in the South, enthusiastically backed the war.

American victory was a foregone conclusion; the United States possessed a larger, better-equipped, and far more organized military than Mexico. The subsequent peace treaty—the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo—was signed on February 2, 1848. America's territory increased by a whopping 25 percent, and Mexico shrank by 55 percent.



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ6C-2133.

“Remember the Alamo” became a battle cry for American soldiers in the Mexican-American war, a reminder of their enemy’s past brutalities.

Many believed there was time to work out a compromise over slavery in the new territories, because none possessed sufficient population to apply for statehood. But with the discovery of gold in 1848 and the subsequent California gold rush in 1849, California's population exploded, rising from 14,000 at the start of 1849 to more than 100,000 by year's end. California was suddenly eligible to organize a territorial government as a prelude to statehood, and the slavery issue was back at center stage.

America's territory increased by a whopping 25 percent, and Mexico shrank by 55 percent.

Because of the North's greater population, it sent more representatives to the House,

but with slave and free states at 15 each, Southerners enjoyed equal representation in the Senate and the power to block antislavery legislation. Admitting new free states would tip the balance in favor of the North. The controversy was resolved—temporarily—with the Compromise of 1850, which, among other details, admitted California as a free state but left the status of the New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, and Utah territories an open question. For agreeing to this, the South got the Fugitive Slave Act.

The Compromise of 1850 only temporarily quieted the controversy, and over the next 10 years, the slavery question grew increasingly contentious, eventually leading to secession and Civil War. ■

Suggested Reading

Brands, *The Age of Gold*.

Eisenhower, *So Far from God*.

Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*.

McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*.

Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs*.

Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*.

Questions to Consider

1. Has the idea of Manifest Destiny played a positive or negative role in American history? Why?
2. Does the reaction triggered by the gold rush say something about the American character?

1846 Land and Gold—The Mexican War

Lecture 20—Transcript

Welcome back. Today, we head for the mid-1840s and the Mexican-American War.

War fever swept the United States on May 13, 1846, when Americans learned that Congress had declared war on Mexico. Thousands of young men eager for glory rushed to join the military. But amid all the enthusiasm and all the jingoism, some Americans saw a dark side for the war with Mexico. They didn't fear losing—because that seemed all but impossible given the state of Mexico's military—they actually feared winning, because victory would bring vast new lands into the American domain and in so doing, it would reignite the divisive slavery question. In Massachusetts, the famous writer Ralph Waldo Emerson stated these fears most succinctly: “The United States will conquer Mexico, but it will be as the man swallows the arsenic, which brings him down in turn. Mexico will poison us.” Think about that: “Mexico will poison us.” Very succinct. Events in the next decade would prove Emerson's prophesy tragically accurate.

As always, let's set out our objectives for this lecture. Today, our examination of the Mexican American War will focus on four things: First, we'll look at the spirit of expansionism known as “manifest destiny.” Next, we'll examine the key role of President James K. Polk in bringing on the Mexican War. Then, we'll explore the war itself and the treaty that gave the United States most of northern Mexico. Finally, we'll see how the subsequent discovery of gold in Northern California triggered a political crisis over the question of slavery.

Let's begin by examining the spirit of expansion that enthused so many Americans in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s. Many of these Americans saw westward expansion not merely in terms of individual opportunity—and they surely saw lots of individual opportunity—they also saw it in terms of the fulfillment of national destiny. Only one year earlier, before the war started, an editor named John L. O'Sullivan coined the phrase “manifest destiny” in his magazine, which was known as the *Democratic Review*. He wrote that it is “our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole

of the continent.” By “manifest destiny,” he meant that America’s expansion westward was both obvious (manifest) and it was part God’s plan (destiny). “Manifest Destiny” soon became a popular phrase used to explain and justify westward expansion. The phrase seemed to imply: Wasn’t it obvious that God had blessed American expansion as a means to spread civilization and republican government? If it’s manifest destiny, who could argue with it? Indeed, in the 1850s, after the United States won the Mexican War and acquired hundreds of thousands of square miles of Mexican territory, many Americans—especially Southerners—insisted that the United States expand further by acquiring all of Mexico and other Latin American countries, like Nicaragua, for example. They also pushed for the purchase or seizure of Cuba, an island with lucrative sugar plantations and 500,000 slaves. “We have a destiny to perform,” said the editor of a Southern magazine called *DeBow’s Review* in 1850, “a ‘manifest destiny’ over all Mexico, over South America, over the West Indies.”

It’s important to point out at this point how Americans in this era embraced the word “empire.” In the 20th century and in the 21st century, as America truly became a global power, Americans began to shy away from that word and always were quick to deny that America ever was an imperialist power or had any kind of imperial or empire-building ambitions. But in the mid-19th century, “empire” was a great word; everybody seemed to think it was a very positive description. That’s why New York is known as the “Empire State”; and if you see a lot of the enthusiastic westward expansion paintings of the day or writings of that day, the word “empire” is thrown around all the time, nobody shies away from it. It’s this spirit of expansionist nationalism that brought the United States into conflict with Mexico.

Trouble between the two countries had been brewing for years. Mexico had won its independence from Spain in 1821, but 25 years later it languished as a weak and fragmented nation. It was a country dominated politically by a small, wealthy elite and most Mexican citizens lived in poverty with very little sense of national identity. By contrast, the United States in the 1840s was very much a nation on the rise. In addition to a very stable political system and a very strong and growing national identity, it also had a booming economy; and we’ve talked about this in several of our lectures, especially the one about Samuel Slater and the birth of the Industrial Revolution.

The first real conflict between the United States and Mexico came in 1835. In the years leading up to this date, thousands of Americans had settled in northern Mexico; in fact, the Mexican government encouraged Americans to settle there. But by 1835, these very Americans began to revolt against the Mexican government; and they were revolting over all kinds of issues, but especially over Mexico's attempts to abolish slavery. Mexico had done so officially in 1829, but allowed some of the Americans to keep their slaves; but it was clear that they were going to close that loophole eventually.

In the ensuing war—a conflict that gave us the famous story of the Alamo—the Americans defeated the Mexicans and won the independence of the Republic of Texas. Everyone at the time knew that the citizens of this new Republic of Texas were eager for annexation by the United States. But the United States government hesitated to act right away; after all, the Mexican government refused to recognize this breakaway Republic of Texas and they warned the United States that annexation of Texas would mean war. The Mexicans clearly let it be known that they considered Texas a rebellious province that they fully intended to bring back someday under their rule. This is very similar to today's political scene with China: China considers Taiwan a breakaway province that will one day return to Chinese rule. Nonetheless, pressure for annexation of Texas mounted in Congress, and nine years after Texas gained its independence, it was admitted to the Union as the 28th state on December 29, 1845. Annexation of Texas immediately raised a controversial question: What was the precise boundary line between Texas and Mexico? Texans had long claimed that it was the Rio Grande River. Mexicans, however, insisted that the boundary was the Nueces River, a boundary that, if you look at a map, would shrink the size of Texas considerably, by almost 50 percent.

Now let's turn our attention to the coming of the Mexican-American War and the key role played by James K. Polk, the President at the time. When President Polk took office in 1845, he made it very clear that he was decidedly pro-expansion; he was a Manifest Destiny president if there ever was one. Accordingly, he wasted very little time in provoking a clash with Mexico. First, he sent a force of 3,500 men under General Zachary Taylor to the Nueces River, ostensibly, he said, to protect the United States from a possible invasion from Mexico. Next, he dispatched a man named John

Slidell on a secret mission to Mexico. Slidell's basic job was to offer in secret to the Mexican government a \$25 million payment in exchange for two things: Mexico had to agree to establish the Texas border at the Rio Grande River, and it had to agree to sell Northern Mexico, the territories that now constitute modern-day California, Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of several other states. Not surprisingly, Mexico had no interest in selling half their country away, and they refused Slidell's offer.

At this point, President Polk decided to step up the pressure, because he's hell bound to get Mexico by hook by or by crook, by any means necessary. He ordered General Taylor to move 150 miles further west to the Rio Grande River. When the Mexicans insisted that he retreat back to the Nueces River—the boundary they believed was the real boundary line between Mexico and the United States—Taylor refused, and, in fact, instead he started to build a fort. This was all part of Polk's plan. He hoped this very aggressive posture would do basically one of two things: It would either convince the Mexicans to back down and sell the tracts of northern Mexico for the \$25 million as Slidell had proposed; or, if the Mexicans decided to attack and try to repel the United States' forces from the region, this would trigger a war the United States would win very easily, and then in the peace treaty the United States would get the territory still.

The new Mexican president, President Jose Herrera, decided to send troops to the Rio Grande River to confront the Americans, who he believed were on their territory. On April 25, 1846, they crossed the Rio Grande River and attacked a 70-man American patrol, killing 16 men and capturing the rest. On April 26—the next day—1846, General Taylor sent a message to the President in Washington. He said that, "hostilities may now be considered commenced." Two and a half weeks later, on May 11, President Polk went before Congress. What Polk was intending to do was seek a declaration of war, and he knew that Congress was divided on this issue, as was the entire country. Let's listen to what he said to kind of amp up the emotion and try to convince Congress that the time had come to declare war: "Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil. ... War exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself." He's pushing the emotional buttons, saying Americans have been killed on American

soil and that it's all Mexico's doing; Congress do your job and declare war. Congress debated this rather vigorously, and it gives you an idea of how divided Americans were about this war. It took them quite a while, but eventually they passed a declaration of war.

Like many national political issues in the 1840s and 1850s, the certain prospect of acquiring a huge chunk of Mexico raised almost immediately the controversial question of slavery. Many Americans, especially Northerners and members of the Whig Party who lived in the North, along, of course, with abolitionists, were opposed to the war. They feared that acquiring all this new land was going to immediately start promoting the spread of slavery into these new western territories. Here we need to make a very important distinction: Most Americans, as we learned in our lecture on abolition and William Lloyd Garrison, were not hard line abolitionists; indeed, most people who disliked slavery disliked it for a number of reasons, short of the way Garrison characterized it. Many opposed slavery simply because they thought it was backwards, that it was sort of out of step with the times compared to industry. They also believed that it was a national embarrassment for the "land of liberty" to also be the land that held more than three million people in bondage. And, of course, some did agree with Garrison that slavery was simply immoral and had to be gotten rid of, otherwise it mocked American institutions; but they did not for the most part support Garrison's call for immediate abolition. They believed that it was just simply crazy.

They did insist—this is where they drew the line—that slavery be confined to the Southern states where it currently existed; and many Americans considered this a sort of moderate, halfway position between slavery and immediate abolition. Somewhere in the middle just bottle it up; contain slavery. If you could contain slavery where it was, they believed that it would eventually wither away; that Southerners would eventually—10, 20, 30 years down the road—wake up and see the superiority of capitalism, of industry, and of wage labor and they'd eventually find a way to free their slaves. When they did so, the vexing problem of slavery—the great contradiction between American liberty thriving amidst American slavery—would be gone. But this would only happen if slavery was contained. Opponents of slavery knew that Southerners were keen to extend slavery into any new territory acquired from Mexico. If they succeeded, slavery would no longer be on the fast track

to extinction; they believed slavery would be strengthened and perpetuated for generations, maybe even forever.

Among the many Americans who were coming to share this view was a rookie Whig Congressman from Illinois named Abraham Lincoln. Like many Americans, he was antislavery but not an abolitionist. He believed the containment of slavery where it currently existed was essential. Lincoln, in the midst of all this furor and discussion about the war, managed to gain a small measure of national attention at the war's outset when he rose in the House of Representatives and demanded that the President show on a map the precise location where this clash between U.S. and Mexican soldiers took place that started the war. "Show me the spot," Lincoln demanded. This is why this demand was ever thereafter known as "the spot resolution." Other Whigs were not so polite in challenging the truth of Polk's claim that American blood had been spilled on American soil. A man named Joshua Giddings, who was a Whig from Ohio, denounced the conflict as "an aggressive, unholy, and unjust war," and he also accused Polk of "the murder of Mexicans upon their own soil" and "robbing them of their country."

But the Democratic Party, with its strong foundation in the South, enthusiastically backed the war; indeed, Southerners expressed wide and zealous support for the war. Let's just listen to what the editor of the *Charleston Courier* said in 1846 when describing the Southern interest in prosecuting this war. He wrote: "Every battle fought in Mexico and every dollar spent there, but insures the acquisition of territory which must widen the field of Southern enterprise and power in the future." What he means by this is very clear: More territory means more slavery, which means more slave states, which means more political power in Congress to protect slavery.

This emerging clash of interests between Southerners determined to spread slavery into the West and Northerners just as determined to contain slavery within its current boundaries took concrete form in the House of Representatives when a congressman named David Wilmot of Pennsylvania introduced a bill that barred slavery from any new territories that were about to be acquired from Mexico. The Wilmot Proviso, as it was eventually called, touched off a bitter fight in Congress; so you have a fight in Mexico going on

while there's a fight in Congress over the fate of the subsequent territories. The Wilmot Proviso was never passed—it made its way through the House but died in the Senate—but by 1849, all but one Northern state legislature had endorsed it, giving you an idea of the political climate of the times. The Mexican War thus reignited sectionalism over the issue of slavery; but this fact would only become apparent after the war ended.

This discussion of the opposition to the war prompts me to add an interesting footnote here. We started this lecture by quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous line that "Mexico will poison us." We should take a moment here, since we're talking about the opposition to war, to note that his friend and protégé Henry David Thoreau also opposed the war, but he took his opposition a little bit further. He refused to pay his taxes to protest the war, and this violation of law landed Thoreau in jail for a little time—he eventually paid the tax—but his experience inspired him to write an essay entitled "Civil Disobedience," and this essay argued that citizens in a republic had to engage every now and again in acts of civil disobedience if their government was behaving badly or illegally to force them to behave properly. This essay would become a famous piece in American literature and an inspiration to justice-seekers all over the world, from Gandhi in India to Martin Luther King, Jr. in the United States in the 1950s and 60s.

Let's turn to the war itself. We won't spend too much time here discussing the nitty-gritty details of the war itself. The American victory in this war, as we noted earlier, was a foregone conclusion. The United States possessed a larger, better-equipped, far better-organized military than Mexico; and Mexican society and therefore its army also suffered from political instability and disunity, and this undermined their war effort. How did the United States win the war? Essentially, the United States attacked Mexico on three fronts: In California, a group of Americans staged an insurrection and proclaimed an independent republic—they were essentially taking a page out of the book of Texas—and they declared that California was now independent, free from Mexican rule; and their goal, of course, was that this would eventually be annexed to the United States. But, quickly, the United States military sent a naval fleet and a troop of regular U.S. army troops; they took control, and there was no more independent republic talk. But still, that land now was in the control of the U.S. military. A second front opened when U.S. forces

commanded by General Zachary Taylor and General John E. Wool attacked central Mexico through Texas. By September, 1846, they'd seized the key city of Monterrey. Five months later, in February, 1847, General Taylor won a major victory at the Battle of Buena Vista.

At that point, the United States government pressured Mexico to negotiate—basically to sue for peace—but they refused; so the military then sent General Winfield Scott to open a third front and deliver the final blow. In March, 1847, General Scott pulled off the first large-scale amphibious operation in American history. He landed 12,000 troops and supplies at the city of Veracruz; and among these men he had under his command were some junior Army officers named Robert E. Lee and Ulysses Grant. They were among scores of officers and soldiers who would later play key roles in the American Civil War. Just to give you a couple of names, among them were the future-Confederacy's Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, P. G. T. Beauregard, Albert Sydney Johnston, and Joseph E. Johnston; and the Union Army's future commanders Ambrose Burnside, George Meade, George B. McClellan, and William T. Sherman. In some ways, the Mexican War was a dress rehearsal for the much larger war that would begin a little more than a decade later.

OK, back to the war. Scott's force quickly took Veracruz and then began to march west, toward the capital, Mexico City. After a series of additional victories, he led his army right into Mexico City by September, 1847. At that point, the war was effectively over. A couple of months of discussions followed, and the subsequent peace treaty—the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo—was signed on February 2, 1848. In this treaty, the United States gained possession of all the land comprising the modern-day states of California, Arizona, and New Mexico, plus parts of Texas, Nevada, Colorado, and Utah. This acquisition increased the size of the United States by a whopping 25 percent. It also shrank Mexico's territory by an astounding 55 percent. In exchange for this territory, the United States agreed to pay Mexico \$15 million, a lot less than Slidell's original purchase offer of \$25 million.

Many Americans were thrilled that victory in Mexican had made the United States a continental power; it seemed the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny.

But others, especially those in Congress, worried that a big fight loomed over how to organize these new lands, especially when the question came down to how the territories would decide whether or not to permit slavery or to prohibit it. The one thing they had in the back of their minds was that they actually had a little bit of time here to work out this problem, because the territories that they had just acquired did not have the requisite population to apply for statehood. That's the point in which fate intervened in the form of the discovery of gold in northern California. Here we see again another example of that theme I've mentioned a few times: that history is the study of surprises. Nobody was expecting this massive gold strike, and further no one was expecting that it would quickly force Congress to confront the slavery question; but that's exactly what happened.

The Gold Rush began, as many people know, in January, 1848. When workers were building a sawmill along the American River in northern California, they looked in the water and noticed shiny flecks of yellow metal in the sand. The mill's owner, John Sutter, realized this was gold, and he tried somewhat successfully to keep this discovery a secret for a while, but there were too many witnesses. By early summer in 1848 the word was out and men could be heard shouting in the streets of San Francisco, "Gold! Gold from the American River!" Soon the small port city of San Francisco was essentially empty; it seemed that every able-bodied man had headed for the hills.

It didn't take long for the rumors,—and soon gold itself—to finally reach the East. In early December, 1848, following many months of rumors, more than 300 ounces of pure gold arrived in Washington, D. C., sent by the new territorial government of California. This news of gold touched off the Gold Rush, a headlong migration of tens of thousands of fortune seekers to California in 1849–1850. The wild reports of massive gold strikes convinced many of these people that they were absolutely certain if they could just get there to strike it rich. They left behind their farms and their workshops in the East and then headed west as quickly as they could; some took steamboats, some headed overland to northern California. Let's listen to the words of one Gold Rush migrant who had recently arrived in California and he wrote home to his family, and you can kind of get a sense of his unease; his expectations that he'd going to make it big, but also his nervousness that he

might not: “I have no pile yet, but you can bet your life I will never come home until I have something more than when I started.”

This episode of gold fever is very similar, if you think about it, to the financial manias that have taken place in the 20th century and in the 21st century. Every so often a hot stock market or a booming real estate market entices normally level-headed, careful Americans to throw caution to the wind and risk everything in a bid to get rich quick; but cold hard reality eventually hits, and often with tragic consequences. In the Gold Rush, most of these fortune seekers, sad to say, ended up with nothing. But still they kept on coming, and California’s population exploded. It was just 14,000 in 1849; the next year it had risen to 100,000; by 1852, the population was over 200, 000. Eighty percent of these new arrivals were American-born, with the rest coming from other parts of the world: Mexico, South America, Europe, and Asia. One small shopkeeper in Coloma, California kind of captured this spirit. He said: “This small place has created all the excitement through the world for gold. Thousands of all nations are here.”

While many people panned for gold, thousands of migrants worked in enterprises that supported the mining industry like hotels, restaurants, banks, saloons, and laundries. The most lucrative business by far was selling supplies to the miners. People called this “mining the miners,” selling miners as pickaxes, shovels, rope, tents, and clothing at outrageous prices to eager miners. Let me ask you a question, would you buy a shovel for \$500? A \$500 shovel, that’s about what some people were willing to pay in today’s dollars at the height of the Gold Rush; and the reason they did this was they were so sure they were going to hit it big that this would all be an expense that would seem irrelevant by the time they hit their big gold strike. One great example of these merchants that took advantage of the gold fever to make a fortune, not in gold but in selling stuff to the gold seekers: James Phelan was an Irish immigrant, and he operated a small dry goods establishment in New York when he heard news of the gold rush. He sensed opportunity; he sold his establishment, filled three ships full of mining equipment, and then headed off to California. When he got there, he established a booming business “mining the miners”; he made a fortune, and then he turned that fortune into buying tons of San Francisco real estate. In 1882, he died one

of the richest men in the state of California, and his son went on to become Mayor of San Fran and a U.S. Senator.

Why is the Gold Rush so significant? The significance of the gold rush and the Mexican War that preceded it was in its political impact. Tens of thousands of people arrived 1849 and 1850, and their arrival suddenly made California eligible to organize a territorial government and apply for statehood. Suddenly, the divisive issue of slavery was back at center stage; the issue that everybody was over the last 20 years trying to bring it off the stage and put it onto the sidelines. Now that slavery was at center stage, people had to make a commitment. Many Northern congressmen were absolutely determined to prevent slavery from spreading into these new western territories; and Southern congressmen were just as determined to permit slavery there. They believed that the admission of more free states—if this territory kept slavery out, these would be free states—would lead to the eventual abolition of slavery. Their reasoning was based on simple math: The North had a greater population, it sent more representatives to the House of Representatives, so the House was dominated by Free State representatives. But in the Senate, the Senate was balanced at 15 states each, free states and slave states; the population didn't matter. So Southerners enjoyed equal representation in the Senate, allowing them to effectively block any legislation that they thought was going to threaten Southern interests, and particularly the issue of slavery. If that's the case, admitting new free states would tip this balance in favor of the North and the free states. If this happened, Southern defenders warned, it would only be a matter of time before a Congress that was dominated by Northerners moved to abolish slavery altogether.

For the next two years, 1848–1850, Congress was consumed by this issue. Tempers flared in the House and Senate, fistfights broke out in Congress, and some congressmen actually began to carry guns to work. State legislatures signed petitions of protest and forwarded them to Washington; pro- and antislavery groups held mass meetings across the country. In June, 1850, hard-line defenders of slavery, sometimes called “fire-eaters,” convened a Southern rights convention in Nashville, Tennessee to “devise and adopt some mode of resistance to Northern aggression.” In the end, the controversy was resolved, temporarily, with the Compromise of 1850. This complex deal had five main provisions, but the two most important—those are the ones

we'll focus on right now—were: California was admitted a free state, and clearly that pleased the people that wanted to keep slavery out of the western territories. In exchange, though, Southerners received a new Fugitive Slave Act, a much stronger one, that required the federal government to pursue slaves and also Northerners to participate and to help in that effort to apprehend and return escaped slaves back to the South.

The question is: Was the Mexican War and the subsequent Gold Rush a turning point in United States history? I think it should be obvious at this point that with all this fuss that began with the seizure of northern Mexico as a result of the Mexican American War that this was clearly a turning point in American history. Even before the war concluded, the prospect of acquiring new territories sparked a contentious debate over the future of slavery. Then came the discovery of gold in California—the American territory of California—meaning that tens of thousands of people would rush there to get rich quick and put California on the fast track to statehood. This development further ratcheted up the slave controversy. The Compromise of 1850 only temporarily quieted the controversy down, and over the next 10 years the slavery question grew increasingly contentious, eventually leading to secession and Civil War. Ralph Waldo Emerson had been right when he said, “Mexico will poison us.”

Once again, we're out of time. In our next lecture, we'll turn to a topic that's closely related to the Mexican-American War: the Homestead Act, a decision that triggered a massive wave of settlement into the West. Thank you.

1862 Go West, Young Man! The Homestead Act

Lecture 21

The single greatest spur to westward settlement in America was the Homestead Act. Enacted in 1862, it provided 160 acres of free land to any settler willing to live on it and improve it for five years. By making more than 600 million acres of public land available to be settled and farmed, it touched off the largest migration of people ever within the United States. In so doing, the Homestead Act also led to increased conflict with Native Americans.

The Homestead Act, passed by Congress in 1862, went into effect after midnight, on January 1, 1863. At 2 a.m. that morning, Daniel Freeman became the first American to take advantage of the Homestead Act. Some 417 others filed claims later that day, and 1.5 million more filed over the next few decades.

Most Americans think in terms of the rugged individualist archetype when it comes to the story of the West. But this image leaves out the perspective of the Native Americans and the role of the federal government in promoting settlement.

Westward migration began long before the Homestead Act, but most movement was confined east of the Mississippi River until the early 1800s. In the first half of the century, territorial acquisition opened up most of the remaining continent, while detailed accounts by explorers like Lewis and Clark allayed popular fears that the West was a perilous wilderness.

In the 1780s the federal government had seen land sales as a source of revenue and set the price at \$1 per acre with a 640-acre minimum—very expensive. The price of federal land remained at \$1.25 per acre as late as 1854. Average Americans began demanding a better price.

Many Southerners feared that westward settlement would lead to the creation of more free states and thus tip the delicate balance in Congress. Homestead bills were passed by the House of Representatives in 1852, 1854, and 1859

but voted down in the Senate. After the secession, Northern Republicans were able to pass various acts aimed at expansion.

The Homestead Act of 1862 provided 160 acres of free land to any man or woman willing to live on it and improve it for five years. By 1934, more than 270 million acres of public land had been given away under the act, some 10 percent of all federal lands. Simply put, the act touched off the largest internal migration in U.S. history.

The act touched off the largest internal migration in U.S. history.

Most of the settlers were native-born white Americans, either landless laborers or farmers searching for larger holdings. Single women also gained homesteads.

Many African Americans, including ex-slaves, took advantage of the act, especially after violence against blacks soared in the mid-1870s. One former slave, Henry Adams, led more than 20,000 African Americans on the Exodus of 1879 from the South to Kansas. Immigrants headed west as well; in 1880, the population of Minnesota was 30 percent foreign-born.

The Homestead Act was successful in that it sent so many people west. But the results of migration were mixed because the program had several flaws, namely inadequate safeguards against scams by land speculators and the varying quality of available land.

Most American farmers were entrepreneurs eager for profits, tied to national markets. Very few were subsistence farmers. As a result, technology played a crucial role in transforming the West, from the cotton gin to the mechanical reaper and the cast-steel plow. But because farmers had to invest in new technology but could not control things like the weather or commodity prices on Wall Street, many farmers fell into in a spiral of debt from which they had difficulty escaping.

Perhaps the most overlooked impact of the Homestead Act is the role it played in propelling America's rise to industrial supremacy by 1900. Between 1860 and 1900, industrial output soared by 584 percent. During that same period, the number of American farms nearly tripled, and the

value of farm production rose 150 percent. Industrialization could not have happened without a massive increase in agricultural output, which fed all those industrial workers.

A second major impact of the Homestead Act was the demise of Native American tribes in the West. By unleashing a torrent of white settlers into the trans-Mississippi, the act dramatically increased the opportunities for conflict between whites and Indians. Many of these wars were precipitated by whites moving onto lands reserved to Indians by formal treaty.

More broadly, because the Homestead Act promoted westward settlement, it played a major role in the rise of the American West as a central aspect of American identity and self image. The Homestead Act was finally repealed in 1979, with Alaska receiving a 10-year exemption. The last homestead was claimed by Kenneth Deardorff in Alaska in 1976. ■

Suggested Reading

Hine and Faragher, *The American West*.

McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*.

Questions to Consider

1. Does the role played by the federal government in promoting westward expansion alter your image of the story of the West?
2. Which group of 19th-century Americans faced greater challenges, city dwellers living in cramped and unsanitary tenement apartments, or homesteaders in the west living in sod houses in thinly settled regions like Nebraska and South Dakota?

1862 Go West, Young Man! The Homestead Act

Lecture 21—Transcript

Hi, there; welcome back. It's New Year's Eve, 1862. While most people in town were either asleep or celebrating the coming of the year 1863, a guy named Daniel Freeman was thinking about land. He was a scout in the Union Army, and he'd recently seen a nice tract of land in a place called Beatrice, Nebraska that he hoped to own someday. His best hope of owning it, though, was the Homestead Act, a new law passed by Congress in 1862 to issue land grants, or homesteads, to worthy Americans. Freeman knew the act took effect after midnight on January 1, 1863. He was not willing to risk waiting around, so at 2 a.m. he woke up the local Land Office clerk to fill out his Homestead claim form because it was after midnight. When the clerk agreed to his unusual request, Daniel Freeman became the first American to take advantage of the Homestead Act. Some 417 other people filed claims later that same day. Over the next few decades, 1.5 million Americans would follow in his footsteps, participating in one of the most extraordinary social programs ever undertaken by the American government.

Let's start with a question: How was the West won? Or perhaps we should rephrase that to say: How was the West settled? Most Americans are conditioned to think in terms of popular culture when it comes to the story of the West. Western movies with John Wayne, television shows like *Bonanza*, *Gun Smoke*, *Little House on the Prairie*, they all tell us that the West was settled by rugged individualists who set out in covered wagons with nothing but their families and hope for a better life. While this image is certainly true for many Americans who headed west—along the Oregon Trail for example—it leaves out some of the several key elements of this story. For one, it leaves out the perspective of the Native Americans who inhabited the trans-Mississippi West. Think about how their version of the story would be something along the lines of *How the West Was Lost*. A second point it leaves out is that the federal government played a major role in promoting westward settlement; and this second point reminds us that while Americans have long revered self-reliance, individualism, and Thomas Jefferson's maxim that "the government which governs least governs best," we have always as Americans relied to some extent on government assistance.

By “assistance,” I don’t mean welfare; far from it. By “assistance” I do mean government programs and policies that are adopted to benefit economic development and social improvement. We’ve already seen a superb example of this in the making of the Erie Canal. The state of New York decided, in the name of economic development and social improvement, to fund the most ambitious public works project in American history, at least until the Interstate Highway System of the 1950s. Other examples of government programs of this sort include public education; or, in the early 20th century, rural electrification; or more recently, the government sponsorship of the Internet, building the Internet out to the far corners of the country. In a word, we should see the Homestead Act as a program where the federal government aimed at boosting westward expansion and westward settlement. In a way, it’s the rural equivalent of the tariff; remember, the tariff was put on imported goods to protect American manufacturers and thus boost industrial development, and so the Homestead Act is to boost westward expansion.

Westward migration had been going on long before the Homestead Act; in fact, you could say that Americans had been moving westward from the very moment that they began arriving on this continent in the early 1600s. But much of this movement was confined to lands east of the Mississippi until the early 1800s. Why this reluctance to push further into the interior? There are several reasons: For one, in the early part of the country’s history, there was plenty of open land in the East. Two, until the mid-19th century, most of this territory that makes up the western United States was not United States territory. Three, almost no one had any idea what exactly lay beyond the Mississippi. They had heard only rumors of a huge desert, of severe weather, of unscalable mountains, wild animals, and most importantly of savage Indians. The question is: What changed?

A number of things changed in the early 1800s that prompted westward settlement: First was population growth due to a rise in immigration and also the natural increase of the American population; and this, of course, led to greater demand for more land. The second factor was territorial acquisitions, starting in 1803 with the Louisiana Purchase that doubled the size of the United States. Next came the purchase of Florida from Spain in 1819; then the annexation of Texas in 1845; the next year the Americans solved a longstanding border dispute with Great Britain and acquired the Oregon

Territory; and that same year, the United States declared war on Mexico and ended up seizing half of Mexico in 1848, increasing the size of the country by 25 percent. A third factor was that detailed accounts of explorers began to be published—Lewis and Clark, Zebulon Pike, John C. Fremont—and these accounts allayed the fears that the West was this howling, perilous wilderness that no one would ever want to go to. Publicists and boosters picked up on this information and churned out countless pamphlets, books, and articles—remember, this is the era of the Communication Revolution, so they're able to get this word out through publications—and these publications extolled the virtues of the West and popularized the idea that it was not a howling wilderness but, in fact, an American Eden; a place of rich resources and tremendous opportunity. All you had to do, these books said almost in one voice, was to get there. There's another fact that boosted westward settlement in addition to these: the rising demand for American grain and corn. This is part of the Transportation Revolution; America is now getting knit into a global economy. With greater demand for grain and corn, there's more incentive to move west and to plant those crops. A fifth reason was due to the rise of the Cotton Kingdom, another topic we've talked about. As plantation owners increased their holdings in the newly-developed areas of the American southeast, they forced out—they bought out or forced out—poor farmers to make their plantations larger, and those poor farmers often ended up heading west where the land was a lot less expensive.

The first significant movement across the Mississippi of these kinds of migrants began in the 1840s along what became known as the Oregon Trail. Then came the Gold Rush in 1849 that, as we discussed in an earlier lecture, touched off a tidal wave of immigration to California. By this time, Americans saw westward migration not merely as individual opportunity but also as part of this national destiny notion that we've talked about before; and we mentioned this when we talked in our previous lecture about Manifest Destiny connected to the Mexican-American War, and it fits here, too. John O'Sullivan in 1845 wrote that it is “our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent.” On the one hand he was eventually advocating acquiring all that territory through purchase or war, and now it's time to fill that territory with Americans.

“Manifest Destiny” soon became a popular phrase to explain and justify westward expansion. A number of very prominent “boosters” emerged, essentially trying to sell this idea of America’s destiny being beyond the Mississippi. Let’s listen to one of the best-known boosters, a man named William Gilpin, who wrote a book in 1859 in which he extolled the virtues of the West: “The destiny of the American people is to subdue the continent—to rush over this vast field to the Pacific Ocean ... to change darkness into light and confirm the destiny of the human race ... Divine task! Immortal mission!” That’s enthusiasm for you; and he was not alone. Many Americans shared Gilpin’s excitement over the prospect of the United States expanding westward to become a bicoastal continental power. They also agreed with him that westward expansion was a “divine task,” implying that God gave his blessing to it.

Now let’s turn to the role that the federal government in promoting westward settlement beyond the Mississippi. It had a long history before the Homestead Act of 1862. In the 1780s, the federal government saw land sales as a vital source of government revenue; so the first efforts to promote westward settlement had to do with raising money. Congress set a price at \$1 per acre, which at the time was extremely expensive; and to make it even more expensive, people wanting to buy government lands had to purchase a minimum of 640 acres—so you had to have \$640 in cash—and you had to pay the price in full up front. Very few people could qualify for this. In 1800, Congress, recognizing this fact, reduced the minimum lot size to 320 acres—still expensive, but not quite as much—and allowed buyers to pay in four installments; so these are better terms, but nonetheless still too expensive for most people. Over the years, Congress changed the law a little bit here and there, but the price of federal land remained very expensive for most people at \$1.25 per acre as late as the mid-1850s.

By that time, many Americans were demanding a homestead act to make federal lands in the West available to the average man, not people with hundreds of dollars in their pocket. The homestead idea—the idea of a homestead act—fit especially well with an increasingly popular vision that linked the health of the republic to the availability of land in the West. We see this in speeches and in all kinds of campaign documents; in position papers by the American Labor movement, for example. I’ll just cite you one

example from the Free Soil Party; remember they formed in 1848. Listen to what they had to say about the need for the West or the linking of the West to American republican destiny: “Let the soil of our extensive domains be kept free for the hardy pioneers of our own land, and the oppressed and banished of other lands”—referencing immigrants—“seeking homes of comfort and fields of enterprise in the new world.” This linking of the health of the republic and the vitality of the republic, the access to greater opportunity and western territory becomes a very important part of the American makeup.

By the 1850s, supporters of westward expansion found their hopes and plans thwarted by Southern members of Congress. Many Southerners feared that westward settlement would lead to the creation of more free states and thus tip the balance in Congress—this delicate balance between free states and slave states—if that were to take place. The homestead bills—there were several of them—that were passed by the House of Representatives in 1852, 1854, and 1859 were all voted down in the Senate. A fourth Homestead Act was passed in 1860, but President Buchanan vetoed it. So how was this impasse overcome? Simple: secession and Civil War.

When one Southern delegation after another withdrew from Congress in 1860 and 1861 after their states seceded, Northern Republicans suddenly found themselves in complete control of Congress; and so thus unimpeded, the 37th Congress passed three pieces of legislation with far-reaching effects upon the American West. First, they passed the Pacific Railway Act of 1862, and this led to the building of the transcontinental railroad. Second, they passed the Morrill Land Grant College Act of 1862, and this encouraged the sale of federal lands and they were going to use the profits to establish agricultural colleges where people could learn more about farming. The third key act they passed was the Homestead Act itself, passed also in 1862. It took effect on January 1, 1863, and it provided 160 acres of free land to any woman or man who were willing to live on it and improve it for five years; and by “improve” they meant two things: You had to start actually farming, tilling the soil, and you had to build a house that was at least 12 by 14 (that’s 12 by 14 feet, by the way; they were pretty modest in those days). The Homestead Act also allowed homesteaders to buy land if they were impatient at a rock-bottom price of \$1.25 an acre after living on it for only six months.

What was the impact of the Homestead Act? Simply put, the Homestead Act touched off the largest migration in U.S. history, and this triggered all kinds of enthusiasm. Let's listen to Horace Greeley, the famous editor of the *New York Tribune*. Most people know sort of the short version of what I'm about to read, which is "Go West, young man." Let's listen to the fuller version of it that he published in 1867: "If you strike off into the broad, free West, and make yourself a farm from Uncle Sam's generous domain, you will crowd nobody, starve nobody, and ... neither you nor your children need evermore beg for Something to Do." More than a million and a half people followed Greeley's advice and acquired homesteads by 1934; so the Act actually lasted quite a long time. This is a total of 270 million acres given away by the federal government to American citizens; about 10 percent of all federal lands.

Who participated in the Homestead Act? First, the largest group was native-born white Americans. These included several subgroups; ambitious farmers who were in the Midwest and East who already had farms but who sought larger farms. One person who brings that to mind is Laura Ingalls Wilder; she's the author of the *Little House on the Prairie* series. Her father received a homestead in Kansas and later a homestead in South Dakota. A second group of native-born farmers were landless men and women in the East. Many were workers who were frustrated by low wages and crowded cities and they were inspired by the visions of the West as this great American Eden, great place of opportunity, so they headed west to claim a homestead. Another group included single women. Many single women gained homesteads, or they held onto them after their husbands died or left them. There's a wonderful picture that many of you may have seen from Nebraska, and it shows four young women standing next to a really primitive sod house; and these were the Chrisman sisters. They were set up by their father—their father got a homestead and then he made sure that each one of them in turn applied for a homestead, one right after the other—and their homesteads were spread out, obviously at 160 acres a piece, but they lived on each other's homesteads in order to keep each other company; so people developed these kinds of strategies to help the families acquire land but also have some kind of community.

Another group that took advantage of the Homestead Act was African Americans; many of them were ex-slaves. You'll remember that after the Civil War, many ex-slaves believed that they were entitled to what they called "40 Acres and a Mule." Land, they believed—quite understandably—would guarantee them freedom, would make them independent farmers, and they would be freed from the control and coercion of their former masters. But unfortunately for them, no such large-scale land redistribution plan ever took place; this was more of a dream than anything else. So most former slaves in the decades after the Civil War found themselves living as poor, landless farmers, forced to rent land from former slave owners. But when violence against blacks soared in the mid-1870s and 1880s, a significant number of African Americans began moving west to acquire homesteads, and they were eligible. There's one particular story worth telling: One former slave named Henry Adams really became enthused about this idea that western lands were sort of the promised land for oppressed former slaves, and this is where they would find opportunity, freedom, and freedom from oppression. In 1879, he led more than 20,000 free blacks in the "Exodus of 1879" from the South to homesteads in Kansas; and this group ever thereafter was known as the "Exodusters."

Immigrants also made up a key part of this migration into the western territories; and it's essential to make the following point when we talk about the American West. We are so conditioned as Americans to think of immigration as an urban phenomenon, and in our discussions of immigration in previous lectures we certainly understand there's a lot of truth behind that notion. But immigration was also a Western thing; that is, it was a key factor in settling the West. Let's just consider the following examples, comparisons: In 1880, the population of the city of Boston was one-third foreign-born. There's no surprise there; we know Boston was a big immigration destination in the late 19th century. But what might be more surprising is the fact that in the same year the population of Minnesota, way out there in the West, was also one-third foreign-born. Minnesota was essentially Boston, just spread out. The American West was a very diverse place and attracted millions of immigrants.

Now let's turn to the key question: Did the Homestead Act actually work? We know that it did work in its most basic goal because lots of people—

more than a million—headed into the West in search of opportunity. But did it work as a program that was intended to establish countless and successful farms operated by hardworking families? We know that there were lots of successful homesteaders and success stories. We mentioned Daniel Freeman at the beginning of our lecture; he was one of the most successful people we know on record. He received his homestead in 1863; he was the first. Five years later he got full title to the tract because he had improved it and built a house; and his farm prospered, and he remained on this homestead for 40 more years until he died in 1908. His wife also lived there beyond his death until her death in 1931.

But the overall results of the Homestead Act were mixed, because the program—like many big programs—had several flaws. For one thing, there were inadequate safeguards against scamming by speculators. As a result, the Homestead Act became, by some people’s judgment, one of the great land grabs in history. Speculators—some of them were just individuals; some of them were also agents, hired by railroads or cattle interests—took advantage of the program in two ways: Sometimes they just simply bought out a farmer who was on his last legs at rock-bottom prices, and then just waited a little bit of time and then sold it at a high price to a newly-arrived settler. More commonly, these speculators applied for homesteads—and sometimes multiple homesteads—with no intention of ever turning a load of dirt; no intention of actually farming or improving the land. Instead, they just simply waited for its value to rise and then sold it for a tidy profit. The problem here was that there were never enough government officials to oversee the program, so speculators could claim, “Oh, sure, I lived on that land for five years, and of course I was doing some farming, and boy you should see my 12 by 14 foot house!” There was a problem there with oversight in the program; and, of course, when push came to shove you could also bribe an official if that was necessary. That’s one problem.

Another problem was the problem of the “one size fits all”; this is a common problem with government programs. They decided that the perfect farm was 160 acres; and it was: In the northern and central portions of the Midwest where the soil and climate were favorable to farming on that scale, 160 acres was, in fact, the ideal plot. But on the Great Plains and lands further to the west with harsher climate, poor soil, and very limited amounts of water,

farmers needed much, much bigger land grants to operate a farm that would actually turn a profit.

Now let's turn to an examination of the role of technology in the settling the West. A key point we need to kind of rid our minds of, at least temporarily, is an idealized image in our minds—which is very central in the American identity—of the American farmer as a self-sufficient, independent, yeoman farmer who lived on the land, content to raise just enough crops to feed his family and maybe sell a little bit of surplus so he got a little hard currency to buy some tools and maybe a few luxuries, a little sugar perhaps, maybe a little coffee, and that was that; and this is the picture we have fixed in our minds of the yeoman farmer, but it's really more image than reality. Most American farmers, we need to remind ourselves, were entrepreneurs. They were men, just like people owning shops and factories, eager for profits. As farmers, they were not independent and self-sufficient; they were tied to national markets. You can tell this by the crops they chose to grow: They grew crops that would fetch the highest prices. Let's put this another way: Very few Americans wanted to be subsistence farmers; in fact, if you were a subsistence farmer, it was against your will in most cases. Most farmers were market-oriented, and as a result they faced market pressure to be incredibly efficient and productive; and this translated into the need to take advantage of the latest technology, just like a factory owner. Technology thus played a key role in the transformation of the American West, not just in the East and in those Eastern factories.

Just about everybody knows the story of Eli Whitney and his invention of the cotton gin, and how it revolutionized production of cotton in the South. But there were others; who were his counterparts in the North and in the West? One of them, in 1834, was a man named Cyrus McCormick, and he invented the mechanical reaper. The mechanical reaper was a device on small wheels—in fact, if you look at one in a picture, to us it looks fairly primitive; but it was a revolutionary device—pulled by a horse, and as it passed through a field, it had sharp blades that moved back and forth severing stalks of wheat; and then the harvested grain was then collected in a cradle at the back end of the reaper. The mechanical reaper allowed for a much faster harvest, which could be really crucial in times of bad weather. It also eliminated for farmers the need to hire expensive—or, if you lived way

out in Nebraska where nobody lived very close by non-existent—farm labor; you could avoid this by buying a mechanical reaper. It also allowed farmers to expand the size of their farms, knowing that if they had 300, 400, 500 acres they could handle that because they now had this device that allowed them to quickly harvest the crop.

A second key technological innovation when it comes to the American West and American farming was created by a man named John Deere, and arguably John Deere had the greatest impact. He was an Illinois blacksmith, and in 1837—just three years after Cyrus McCormick—he designed the first cast steel plow that sliced smoothly through the tough soil on the Great Plains, which some people described as like concrete; so having a sharp, strong plow was really important. This made Western farming so much easier; and, again, you could plow a much, much bigger field with this technology than you could with the old wooden or iron plows.

This kind of commercial farming that was made possible by technology held out the prospect of profits and upward mobility for millions of Americans; and there were lots and lots of success stories. But because farmers had to invest in this new technology, and because they couldn't control things like weather or commodity prices on Wall Street, many farmers fell into in a spiral of debt from which they had great difficulty escaping. If you look ahead in time into the 1870s and into the 1880s, two of the biggest social movements in America are protest movements: In the 1870s it's the Grangers, organizations of farmers; and in the 1880s and 1890s, it's the Populist movement. Who were they mad at? They were mad at Wall Street commodities buyers who were controlling the prices of their products without getting their hands dirty; they were mad at the railroads who were charging exorbitant prices to move their product into eastern markets. Farming was not an easy job by any means, and they were very much connected to the industrial economy in the wider United States.

What's the larger impact of the Homestead Act? Perhaps one of the most overlooked impacts of the Homestead Act is the role it played in propelling America's rise to industrial supremacy by 1900. We often use a bit of a sort of historical shorthand to say that America went “from farm to factory,” and we use this to describe the process by which the U.S.

went from being predominantly agricultural in its economy in 1815 to a predominantly industrial one in 1900. But this is a very deceptive term; and from a historians' perspective or an economists' perspective it's actually not just deceptive, it's inaccurate. Just think about these statistics: First, the familiar, some industrial stats. Between 1860 and 1900, the number of factories in America jumped from 140,000 to 500,000; huge growth in the number of factories and the size of those factories. At the same time, industrial output soared by 584 percent; so we're talking about an exploding industrial economy. No surprises there. But in the same period, the number of farms nearly tripled, from over 2 million to 5.7 million, and the value of farm production rose 150 percent. The United States did not go "from farm to factory," because industrialization could not have happened without a massive increase in agricultural output. Otherwise, think about this, how would all those industrial workers and city dwellers find food? They needed those farmers to be farming the West and doing it at a much more efficient and far more productive rate every year. Factory growth and industrial growth just simply grew faster than farm growth, but it's still accompanied by great growth in agriculture.

A second major impact of the Homestead Act was the demise of Native American tribes in the West. By unleashing a torrent of white settlers across the trans-Mississippi West, the Homestead Act dramatically increased the opportunities for conflict between whites and Native Americans. Consider all the major Indian Wars west of the Mississippi that took place after 1862: The Dakota War of 1862; the Colorado War in the mid-1860s; Red Cloud's War, also in the mid-1860s; the Comanche Campaign from 1868–1874; the Great Sioux War of 1876–77; the Nez Perce War of 1877; and then the final conflict, the final big one, at Wounded Knee in 1890. Many of these wars were precipitated by whites moving onto lands specifically reserved to Indians by formal treaty. The federal government, however, nearly always responded in the same way: not by ejecting illegal settlers, but by demanding that Native Americans sign a new treaty ceding more land. When Indians would resist this kind of pressure, the government then would usually send in the Army. As we'll see in a subsequent lecture, this is why General George Custer was in Montana in 1876 when he and 250 of his men were wiped out by resisting Sioux and Comanche Indians. More broadly, because the Homestead Act promoted so much westward settlement, it

played a major role in the rise of the American West as a central aspect of the American identity.

Let's now move on to a final question: When did the Homestead Act end? The Homestead Act was finally repealed in 1979; can you believe it? It actually went a little bit longer beyond that: Alaska got a 10-year exemption, so it actually lasted until 1989. The last official homestead claimed was by a man named Kenneth Deardorff in Alaska in 1979.

In our next lecture, we'll look at one of the most critical turning points in American history: the Battle of Antietam during the Civil War.

1862 Terrible Reality—The Battle of Antietam

Lecture 22

The Civil War was indisputably a major turning point in U.S. history, but the Battle of Antietam deserves recognition as a turning point in its own right. This Union victory allowed President Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which fundamentally changed the aims of the war. The proclamation in turn all but eliminated one of the looming threats to Union victory: English intervention on behalf of the Confederacy.

In September 1862, the war was not going well for the Union. The huge Peninsular Campaign to take Richmond, the Confederate capital, had failed that summer. Lincoln knew he needed to turn up the heat on the Confederacy by issuing an Emancipation Proclamation. But he was advised to wait for a Union victory to avoid looking desperate.

In contrast, the Confederacy was brimming with confidence. They believed that a major victory over the Union on Northern soil would strengthen the hand of the Northern Democrats, who would eventually force Lincoln to sue for peace, and in the meantime it would lead the British to intervene on behalf of the South.

On September 4, 1862, General Robert E. Lee crossed into Maryland. His plan was to wreak havoc, cause panic and despair in the North, and if possible win a decisive victory. He was destined to meet with Union forces under the command of General George B. McClellan at Antietam Creek, near Sharpsburg, Maryland.

McClellan was a hugely popular commander and a superb organizer and motivator of men, but he was a fundamentally flawed, timid commander with a monumental ego bordering on a messiah complex. The Peninsular Campaign had failed in large part because of his excessive caution.

Lee, in contrast, did not cut a dashing martial figure but was a superb strategist, bold commander, and astute reader of his opponent. Military

historians call his strategy the offensive-defensive: He knew the South needed to fight defensive war because of its disadvantages in men and arms, but he believed in taking the offensive when an opportunity presented itself.

Soon after Lee entered Maryland, two Union officers found a copy of Lee's battle plan. McClellan now had a blueprint for destroying Lee's army one piece at a time. Yet it took McClellan 18 hours to act on the information, giving a Confederate sympathizer in McClellan's ranks time to inform Lee—who acted with lightning speed to consolidate his forces near Antietam Creek. McClellan arrived on September 15 with a three-to-one advantage in numbers but waited a day and a half to attack, allowing Lee to gather his numbers and prepare his defenses.

On September 17, McClellan launched a three-pronged assault on the Confederate forces. Poor execution of the battle plan and McClellan's timidity at crucial junctures, however, thwarted an outright Union victory.



President Lincoln visits General McClellan in his tent near Antietam Creek in September or October of 1862.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-cwpb-01131.

The tactics employed also help explain why 620,000 Americans died in the Civil War: Officers on both sides stubbornly stuck to tactics that modern weapons had rendered obsolete. Infantry assaults on fortified trenches had been standard military procedure for centuries, but quick-reloading rifled muskets and long-range artillery made such tactics suicidal.

September 17 turned out to be the deadliest day in U.S. history, with an astonishing 23,000 casualties in one day, including 3,654 dead—four times the casualties suffered in the allied invasion of France on D-Day.

Officers on both sides stubbornly stuck to tactics that modern weapons had rendered obsolete.

Lee waited for McClellan's attack on September 18—none came, despite the Union's vastly superior numbers. On September 19, Lee retreated to Virginia, and McClellan wrote to the Union Army headquarters of a great

victory. But he did not understand that the goal of modern war is to destroy the enemy army, rather than take and hold territory.

Antietam was a technical Union victory because Lee retreated, but the significance of Antietam reached far beyond the field of battle. First, it underscored the absolute necessity of capable military leadership; Lincoln soon relieved McClellan of command. Second, the victory allowed Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which transformed the nature of the war from one to restore the Union to one to end slavery. Thus Antietam greatly diminished chances of British recognition of Confederate legitimacy. Britain was the world's advocate of abolition; Parliament had abolished slavery in the empire in 1833 and fought to end the international slave trade for decades. Britain could not justify aiding the Confederacy's effort to save slavery.

Antietam also announced the terrible reality of modern war. Just days after the battle, Mathew Brady and a team of photographers went to the battlefield and took hundreds of pictures. Photographs of bleak and scarred landscapes littered with the broken bodies of soldiers stood in stark contrast to the popular, romanticized visions of war drawn by artists. These photos warned

Americans that the Civil War would be a prolonged conflict, deadlier and more destructive than anyone could have imagined. ■

Suggested Reading

McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*.

———, *Crossroads of Freedom*.

Sears, *Landscape Turned Red*.

Questions to Consider

1. How would you explain McClellan's reluctance to take the offensive and aggressively pursue Lee's army?
2. How real was the threat of European intervention in the Civil War before Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation?

1862 Terrible Reality—The Battle of Antietam

Lecture 22—Transcript

Hello. Good to see you again. Welcome back to our latest exploration of a key turning point in American history. Today, it's the Battle of Antietam, during the American Civil War.

Let's start out this morning with some thoughts about the American Civil War. The Civil War was, first and foremost, a costly war. It involved four years of fighting, and it was the deadliest war in American history; in fact, it's the deadliest in the entire western hemisphere. It killed 620,000 Americans. That's the equivalent to 6.4 million Americans today if we had a war of this magnitude. It's also more than all the deaths of every U.S. war from the Revolution to Vietnam combined. Now that is a destructive war. The Civil War was also a revolutionary war. It brought about the end of 246 years of slavery. That meant that four million people suddenly gained their freedom. It also meant that Southerners lost about \$4 billion (that's in 1860 dollars) in slave property.

Before we go any further talking about this war and the Battle of Antietam, let's set out the objectives for this lecture. Over the course of this talk, we'll cover four main points: First, we'll place the Battle of Antietam in context by briefly outlining the situation of the war in the summer of 1862. Next, we'll assess the key commanders: the Confederacy's Robert E. Lee and the Union's George B. McClellan. Third, we'll examine the main stages of the battle, and along the way we'll note the key decisions made by the commanders—both the positive ones and the negative ones—that shaped the battle's outcome. Then finally, we'll analyze the larger significance of the battle's outcome, because it had an impact far beyond the battlefield, as we shall see.

Let's begin by placing this battle in context. What's the situation in the summer of 1862? For the Union, the war was not going well, at all. In the East, General George B. McClellan had launched a huge spring campaign to seize the Confederate capital of Richmond. It was called the "Peninsular Campaign," but it ended in pretty much failure in July, despite the fact that the Union had enormous advantages in soldiers, ships, and equipment.

Then out in the western theatre, Confederate armies under General Braxton Bragg and Kirby Smith had won several victories and basically were on the offensive and heading north, causing a lot of alarm among the Union. This grim situation for the Union convinced Lincoln that he needed to turn up the heat on the Confederacy by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. But one of his key advisors said, “You better wait for a Union victory before making this announcement; otherwise, since it’s such a radical pronouncement, it will come across as looking desperate. Wait for a victory, then make the announcement.” To Lincoln’s eternal frustration, he had to wait two months until a Union army finally won a victory, and in between that the Union armies suffered another terrible defeat in August, 1862 at the Second Battle of Bull Run. By late summer 1862, Northern morale was sagging, to say the least. Hopes for a quick and easy victory that were prevalent in the spring of 1861 were now long gone. In Washington, D.C., on August 27, 1862, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., observed the gloom; sort of put it in context for us. Listen to what he had to say: “The air of this city seems thick with treachery; our army seems in danger of utter demoralization. ... Everything is ripe for a terrible panic, the end of which I cannot see or imagine.”

In contrast, the Confederacy was brimming with confidence. Southerners believed that Confederate independence was right around the corner. They had grown convinced that one Confederate soldier could whip five Yankees in the field. They were convinced that no Union general could match the brilliance of Lee or Jackson. They believed that they could win despite the fact that they had much smaller armies and far fewer supplies. Confederates further believed that a major victory over the Union, especially if they could pull one off on Northern soil, would do two things for them: One, it would strengthen the hand of Peace Democrats in the North—these were Democrats who opposed the war—and this might force Lincoln and the Republicans to sue for peace and recognize Confederate independence. A second possibility: A big Confederate victory would lead to British intervention. Remember, Great Britain was the world’s superpower at this point, and Great Britain had lots to gain by seeing a rising power like the United States permanently divided. Great Britain also needed Southern cotton to feed their industry. They had a lot of incentive to see the Confederacy gain their independence; but up to this point, so far, they had adopted a “wait and see” approach. Confederates thought, though, if they could win a big

one, Great Britain would step in and stop the war. Knowing this, Robert E. Lee sought permission and received permission to invade the North. He did so beginning on September 4, 1862; he took his army into Maryland. His plan was pretty straightforward: Wreak havoc where possible; cause panic and despair throughout the North; and, if possible—if he could find a Union army to engage him—win a decisive victory. Now, with Lee's invasion in motion, let's pause here to assess the key commanders of this impending Battle of Antietam.

Let's start with George B. McClellan: McClellan graduated from West Point in 1846, and he enjoyed—I guess what we'd say—a modestly successful career in the Army. He resigned in 1857 to become a railroad executive and actually was pretty good at that. Four years later, though, in 1861 when the war broke out, McClellan rejoined the Army. He gained attention in Washington at the War Department early on in the war by winning two very small victories in western Virginia. They're small victories, but when you're starving for victories it turned out they were read as large ones. So in July, 1861, after the Union suffered its humiliating defeat at the first Battle of Bull Run, President Lincoln turned to McClellan to take command of the Army of the Potomac.

McClellan proved hugely popular. Although he turned out to be a very short man, he cut a very dashing and impressive figure. The press loved him and took to calling him the "Little Napoleon." McClellan looked like a winning general (if you've ever seen a photograph of him); he acted like a winning general; he spoke like a winning general; but as it turned out, he possessed only some of the necessary ingredients. On the one hand, McClellan was a superb organizer and a great motivator of men. He singlehandedly transformed the Army of the Potomac from a rabble of inexperienced, untrained, and frankly demoralized men into a real army. But on the other hand, McClellan was a fundamentally flawed character. He possessed a monumental ego; almost a messiah-like complex. Listen to what he had to say when he wrote to his wife while he was sort of on top of the world at this moment before his first engagement: "I seem to have become the power of the land. I almost think that were I to win some small success now I could become Dictator or anything else that might please me." Pretty extraordinary words; it gives you an idea of who General McClellan was and his rather

inflated ego. But despite this inflated ego, McClellan was actually a very timid commander when it came to fight. He always refused to seize the initiative out of fear of failure. He moved his armies with extreme caution, always allowing his Confederate opponents to seize the initiative. He always complained while he was moving slowly that he was badly outnumbered by the Confederates, despite the fact that he always had much, much larger armies. McClellan was, as they used to say where I grew up, “all sizzle and no steak.”

Confederate General Robert E. Lee, in contrast, did not cut such a dashing martial figure, but as it turns out he was clearly far more effective. Lee was the son of a Revolutionary War hero, “Light Horse” Harry Lee. He graduated from West Point in 1829, served in the Mexican War with distinction, and because of this—Lee loved the Army—he continued and had a very long and successful Army career. But in 1861, like a lot of Southern men in the Army, he resigned when his home state seceded from the Union, and he joined, later, the Confederate army. Initially, in 1861–1862, Lee actually held a very minor military command. But then he became an advisor to President Jefferson Davis, and that was kind of a key moment in his movement up the chain.

In 1862, Jefferson Davis put Lee in command of the Army of Northern Virginia when General Joseph E. Johnston was badly injured at the Battle of Fair Oaks. Lee quickly adopted a strategy that military historians term the “offensive-defensive.” Overall, the South needed to fight a defensive war for a very simple reason: It had incredible disadvantages in the number of men and the amount of arms that they could put to bear. But also part of this strategy was that the South would take the offensive whenever the opportunity presented itself. This strategy was going to be Lee’s kind of calling card, and he was a superb strategist. He was also a gambler, as we’ll see in his move at Antietam; and he was also an astute reader of his opponents, especially indecisive commanders like General George B. McClellan.

OK, now that we’re acquainted with the key players, let’s examine the events that led up to the battle. Soon after Lee entered Maryland, two Union officers made an astonishing discovery. They found a copy of Lee’s battle

plan wrapped over three cigars, and it revealed that Lee had divided his army into three small forces and then sent them separately to seize a Union arsenal and about 12, 000 Union soldiers at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. This plan made its way to McClellan. You have to imagine this: Here's General George B. McClellan holding in his hand the very plans of Robert E. Lee. He knows precisely what Lee is thinking, what Lee is doing, and where Lee's three small forces are located. He knows, in short, that he has a blueprint for completely destroying Lee's army, one piece at a time. McClellan acknowledged this fact: He said to the officers around him, "Here is a paper with which if I cannot whip 'Bobby Lee,' I will be willing to go home."

It was, and he didn't. This became—this squandered moment—became the first of five squandered opportunities on the part of General George B. McClellan. Instead of moving immediately to exploit his advantage, McClellan took 18 hours to move. This delay allowed Lee to learn about the fact that McClellan now had his plans, and then to act with lightning speed. First, he immediately began consolidating the separate wings of his army; remember he had broken it up into three small pieces, which made him very vulnerable. Secondly, he sent a small force to plug the vital Turner's Gap in South Mountain; this is a pass in the Blue Ridge Mountains that McClellan would have to get through in order to get to Robert E. Lee and the Confederate Army. These Confederates, this small contingent, held off the blue coats for the better part of a day, and thus bought Lee very precious time. If McClellan hadn't waited all those hours, and if he had acted speedily, his army could have walked through this pass unopposed. His delay essentially allowed Lee to consolidate his forces at Sharpsburg, Maryland, near the Antietam Creek (now we can see why, like most Civil War battles, it has two names). McClellan arrived there after Lee arrived on September 15. He possessed a huge advantage in numbers, almost three to one by some counts; certainly two to one. But again, McClellan waited a day and a half; this would represent the second great squandered opportunity that he would let slip through his fingers. The delay again allowed Lee to gather his numbers—remember his three separate armies—and prepare his defenses.

OK, now that we have this set, let's move to the battle itself, which took place on September 17, 1862. How should we picture this? Imagine a battle

line running north to south, with the Confederates on the left and the Union forces on the right. McClellan actually was a good strategist, and he had a very good plan in place: In close succession he would hit the Confederate left really hard, then hit the Confederate right—and this ideally would prevent Lee from shifting reinforcements to the left—and then, once those two steps were in place, he would deliver the finishing blow at the center; remember, the Union Army under McClellan outnumbered Lee 90,000 to 40,000 at least. But the plan of McClellan failed for two basic reasons: The first reason it failed was poor execution; McClellan and his key commanders executed this plan very poorly. What this boiled down to was that these three Union attacks that we just described on the Confederate left, right, and center occurred not as a successive flurry (one, two, three) but in piecemeal fashion (1... then 2 ... then 3); and this, of course, greatly diminished their impact, because they allowed Robert E. Lee to shift his small numbers to meet each new attack as it developed. The second problem with this execution was McClellan's timidity, which we've already talked about. At crucial junctures in the battle, McClellan would be just simply too afraid to do what he needs to do.

How did this all unfold? Phase one, the morning assault on the Confederate left: This began at 5:30 a.m. when General Joe Hooker—"Fighting Joe," as he was known to his men—attacked the Confederate left; and, as "Fighting Joe," he moved very aggressively but then encountered fierce Confederate resistance at a large cornfield. Both sides brought up artillery and began blasting away at each other; and the carnage was, to say the very least, extreme. Let's listen to what General Joseph Hooker wrote years later in describing the carnage on this day: "In the time I am writing," Hooker later wrote, "every stalk of corn in the ... field was cut as closely as could have been done with a knife, and the slain lay in rows precisely as they had stood in their ranks a few moments before."

What then followed was a see-saw battle all morning long, back and forth. At first, Union troops drove the Rebels back, threatening to buckle the Confederate left; but then Lee shifted reinforcements there and this led to a furious Confederate counterattack that pushed Hooker all the way back to where he had started. Then another Union assault retook the cornfield and pushed the Confederates again to the breaking point; but more Confederates

were thrown into the battle, this time by General Stonewall Jackson, and his men pushed the Union advance back. “Men fell about me like flies on a frosty morning”; that’s how one Union commander remembered the battle. By morning’s end, 13,000 men had fallen before essentially a stalemate ensued, and at this point the action shifted to the Confederate center.

Phase two of the battle: the midday assault on the Confederate center. With three-quarters of Lee’s men trying to hold the Confederate left, Confederate General D. H. Hill was stuck in the center with just 2,500 men; his job was to hold the center. He was outnumbered at least two to one; but the one thing he had in his advantage was he had a pretty strong defensive position. He was on the top of a rising field that was topped by a sunken road. At 9:30 a.m., General William French of the Union attacked this position and was repulsed. Three more Union waves stormed the Confederate center, each one repulsed at incredibly terrible cost. The descriptions of these assaults simply boggle the mind. The artillery and rifle fire from the Confederate center was so intense men bowed their heads and leaned forward as they advanced, walking as if they were heading into a howling blizzard (of course, it’s lead and artillery fire). Let’s listen to how the *New York Tribune* correspondent who watched this scene unfold described it:

On the great field were riderless horses and scattering men, clouds of dirt from solid shot and exploding shells, long lines of infantry swaying to and fro, with columns of smoke rising from their muskets, red flashes and white puffs from the batteries—with the sun shining brightly on all this scene of tumult.

That’s quite a scene.

And yet, through all of this, the Union attackers kept pressing forward; and when they got within 100 yards of the Confederate position they fixed bayonets and charged. Finally, at 12 noon, a fifth Union assault turned the tide: They managed to seize a hill overlooking the sunken road, poured fire down into the sunken road; this caused the Confederates to back off, and their backing off triggered, inadvertently, a chaotic retreat. Suddenly at this moment, at midday, the Confederate center was wide open. General McClellan had another great opportunity, a golden opportunity, to smash

through the center and end the battle. “There was no body of Confederate infantry in this part of the field,” later wrote a Confederate officer, “that could have resisted a serious advance.” Another Confederate said, “Lee’s army was ruined, and the end of the Confederacy was in sight.”

But—I’ll bet you’ve already guessed—this was squandered opportunity number three. Ever-cautious, McClellan was really shaken by morning’s carnage; and he decided against another assault. He was convinced that Lee had more than 100,000 troops and that he was just about to counterattack; and so when a subordinate asked him what he was going to do, he said, “It would not be prudent to make the attack,” and so instead McClellan ordered his troops to take up defensive positions. I’ve read about the Battle of Antietam many times, and I have to say no matter how many times I read about this moment of the battle, I find myself almost shouting at the pages of the book, like your typical sports fan shouting at the TV, “C’mon, Mac! This is your chance! Do it!” We know from the memoirs of many of the Union officers that were there that day, they were actually thinking the same thing.

Now it’s time to talk about phase three, the afternoon assault on the Confederate Right. Remember, these are happening with great space in between them, unlike the plan on paper that McClellan had drawn up. This part was actually supposed to be the second phase, but it didn’t happen at the right time because the Union General Ambrose Burnside didn’t get his orders until late in the morning from McClellan, and then he compounded that by taking five hours to seize a bridge that would allow him to get his force across the Antietam Creek and then to hit the Confederate right. Finally, at 3:00 p.m.—this is nine-and-a-half hours into the battle—Burnside finally hit the Confederate right; and he still had time to win the day. If he’s successful, he could sweep in behind Lee’s army and cut off his one line of retreat back to Virginia. This would effectively end the battle and maybe even the war.

Burnside was initially successful in beginning to crumple the Confederate right; but at 3:30 p.m., in its moment of greatest peril, the Confederacy received a miraculous reprieve courtesy of General A. P. Hill. He’d been 17 miles away at Harpers Ferry when he learned of the battle, and he and his men essentially ran the whole way, all day. When they got there, they were completely exhausted, but he threw his men into Burnside’s flank, which

managed to scatter several Union regiments. At this point, Burnside still had the upper hand, but he's flustered by this sudden arrival and he decided to fall back and ask for reinforcements, even though he had twice the enemy that lay in front of him. McClellan, at this moment, again considered sending in fresh reserves to take advantage of the situation, but he doesn't; squandered opportunity number four. He feared that Lee had reserves, which we know were nonexistent, and he refused to act. In total, in the course of this battle all day long, he had held back—McClellan did—25 to 30 percent of his force; never put them into battle.

Soon thereafter, night fell and the battle—the deadliest day in American history—was over; and the carnage was simply astonishing. Even for the Civil War, which was a very bloody war, this day was beyond most people's imagination: 23,000 casualties total in one day; that included almost 3,700 men killed. The Union lost over 12,000; the Confederacy over 10,000. That's four times the casualties suffered on D-Day on June 6, 1944. But, of course, the battle was not over; it was over for that day, but the battle itself was not over. Remember how many Civil War battles actually were carried out over a series of days.

What happened the next day? The next day, Lee had only 30,000 effective troops versus McClellan's more than 70,000; so again, a huge disparity. Lee essentially waited for McClellan's attack, he just expected it was going to come; but none did come, despite superiority on the part of McClellan. This was the fifth squandered opportunity at the Battle of Antietam. The next day, September 19, Lee retreated back to Virginia, handing McClellan a technical victory. McClellan, of course, was thrilled with his performance. Let's listen to what he had to say to his wife when he wrote her a letter:

Those in whose judgment I rely tell me that I fought the battle splendidly & that it was a masterpiece of art ... I feel that I have done all that can be asked in twice saving the country. ... I feel some little pride in having, with a beaten and demoralized army, defeated Lee so utterly. ... Well, one of these days history will I trust do me justice.

In McClellan's eyes, he's won another spectacular victory and saved the day. Lincoln and the leaders in the War Department, of course, thought otherwise; they were despondent over the many blown opportunities that McClellan had let slip through his fingers and allowed Lee to escape.

At this point, let's ask a question: What is the significance of Antietam? In some ways, it sounds like a really frustrating battle; but as it turns out, it's an extraordinarily important one over the course of the war. Let's start with the first reason: First and foremost, the Battle of Antietam underscored the absolute necessity of having capable military leadership. Lincoln, not surprisingly, was soon going to relieve McClellan of his command, but he was going to spend two more years casting about, trying to find the right general that understood modern war. He would eventually find Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, and several others who would indeed understand modern war and bring it to a conclusion. Second, the victory at Antietam allowed Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. Remember, way back in the summer of 1862 he'd decided to issue it but decided to wait for a Union victory. Now, in September, he finally had it. Five days after the battle was over, Lincoln issued it, and it freed the slaves in most of the South. This revolutionary document transformed the nature of the war. No longer was the war a war just simply to restore the Union; now it was a war also to end slavery, and this was an effort that would require the conquest of the South and dismantling of Southern society. Finally, Antietam greatly diminished the chances that Great Britain would intervene on behalf of the South. Now that emancipation had become a key goal for the Union war effort, it was very unlikely that Britain, a nation that was dedicated to abolition and was the leading foe of the international slave trade, could find any way that they could justify and aide the Confederacy, because the Confederacy was clearly a nation that was fighting to preserve slavery. These things together make it clear that the Battle of Antietam was indeed one of the great turnings point certainly in the Civil War, but, in fact, in all of American history.

Let's end this examination of the Battle of Antietam by pointing out one final significance: Antietam announced the terrible reality of modern war. Just days after the battle, Mathew Brady, America's most famous photographer, sent a team of photographers down to the battlefield, and they took hundreds of pictures. Brady then mounted an exhibition, "The Dead of Antietam," at

his New York studio in November, 1862. Thousands of people came to it and were stunned by what they saw. War photography was new—relatively new, anyway—and these photographs of bleak and scarred landscapes littered with broken bodies of Union and Confederate soldiers stood in stark contrast to the popular, romanticized visions of war drawn by artists, the things that people were used to seeing. These usually showed men in brightly-colored uniforms dashing into battle, maybe a few here and there that were falling gallantly but always with their limbs intact and almost no sign of blood whatsoever; it all looked very gallant and dashing. The “Dead of Antietam” was something altogether different; it delivered a blunt and unambiguous message: The men whose bodies lay strewn across the bleak battlefields might have died gallantly, but they also died in a brutal manner, shredded by cannon fire, pierced by bullets, and then splayed in irregular, undignified poses in the cold dirt.

The impact of these photographs was best expressed by an editor for the *New York Times* who went and saw the exhibition. Let’s listen to what the *Times* editors had to say about the power of this new medium of wartime photography:

The dead of the battle-field come up to us very rarely, even in dreams. We see the list in the morning paper at breakfast, but dismiss its recollection with the coffee ... Mr. Brady has done something to bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war. If he has not brought the bodies and laid them in our door-yards and along streets, he has done something very like it.

Little did they know—the people that read those words or saw the exhibition—that some two-and-half years more of this “terrible reality and earnestness of war” lay ahead. Antietam announced that this would be a prolonged conflict, deadlier and more destructive than anyone could have ever imagined when the war had begun.

That does it for Antietam. In our next lecture, we’ll explore the story of the Fourteenth Amendment, one of the most significant amendments ever added to the Constitution.

1868 Equal Protection—The 14th Amendment

Lecture 23

During the Reconstruction, America embarked on a radical experiment in multiracial democracy. By far the most significant and far-reaching accomplishment was the Fourteenth Amendment. It defined American citizenship for the first time and established the federal government's responsibility to protect each American's civil rights. The Fourteenth Amendment would eventually form the basis of the African American civil rights movement, as well as similar efforts toward women's, immigrants', and gay and lesbian rights.

Many legal scholars, historians, and civil rights activists have argued that the Fourteenth Amendment is the most important amendment added to the Constitution after the original Bill of Rights. Americans shared a belief in equality that went back at least as far as 1776, but their understanding of the term was very limited until the radical abolitionists began to claim that the fundamental meaning of American liberty was equal rights for all.

The core philosophy of radical abolitionism insisted that all Americans, irrespective of race, gender, or immigrant status, were entitled to equal civil rights. Today most Americans see these rights as basic and untouchable, but this was not the case in the 1830s and the 1840s.

Emancipation raised a compelling question in 1865: What would be the legal status of former slaves? Would African Americans be given full civil, social, political, and economic rights as citizens of the United States, or would they be relegated to a serf-like status, somewhere between slave and free citizen? A second, related question involved the status of the Southern states. Would they be readmitted quickly, or would there be an indefinite period of military occupation and reshaping of Southern society?

Most Southerners and many Northerners wanted quick readmission for the states and freedom but little more—certainly not citizenship and equality—for African Americans. President Andrew Johnson agreed; he envisioned

African Americans as a peasant labor force with minimal legal rights and absolutely no civil, social, or political rights. While Congress was out of session for much of 1865, Johnson readmitted the former Confederate states with nominal conditions and, in December, announced that Reconstruction was complete.

African Americans began to join fully in the political process, voting in great numbers and serving in state and federal offices.

Northern Republicans and most former slaves rejected this “all is forgiven” Reconstruction. They were enraged by reports of rampant, unpunished violence by whites against blacks and the passage of rights-limiting black codes by Southern

states. In 1866, the Republican-dominated Congress passed the Civil Rights Bill. It declared all persons born in the United States—including African Americans—to be citizens of the United States. This was the first official definition of American citizenship. President Johnson vetoed the Civil Rights Bill, but Congress overrode the veto, and it became law on April 9, 1866.

In the wake of the Memphis race riots a month later, however, Republicans realized stronger measures were necessary. On June 13, 1866, moderate and radical Republicans passed the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which in brief said all citizens were equal under the law and redefined the role of the federal government as the guarantor of individual civil rights. Any state that denied adult male citizens, including African Americans, the right to vote would be penalized by having its representation in Congress reduced. Soon thereafter, Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment, which asserted that no citizen could be denied the right to vote on the basis of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

For the next five years, the Republican Congress and President Ulysses S. Grant pursued a Reconstruction policy that reflected the spirit of equal rights for all. Perhaps most significant was the use of federal authority against armed white vigilante groups like the Ku Klux Klan. African Americans began to join fully in the political process, voting in great numbers and serving in state and federal offices, and Southern state governments achieved several significant reforms.



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppga-02837.

The peaceful, joyous ideal of Reconstruction portrayed by artists was very different from reality, which was marred by violence and oppression.

Unfortunately, this experiment in multiracial democracy was short lived. After 1873, the federal government backed off its commitment to democracy and equality. One by one, Reconstruction governments were replaced by Redeemer governments that reimposed white supremacy. By the late 1870s, Congress was choosing not to enforce the Fourteenth Amendment, and a very conservative Supreme Court all but negated the equal rights purpose of the amendment, yet gave significant rights to corporations. *Plessy v. Ferguson* established the “separate but equal” doctrine, and in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad* ruled that corporations were de facto persons.

But the key principles of the Fourteenth Amendment remained in place, waiting for subsequent generations of Americans to revive them. The breakthrough Supreme Court case was the *Brown v. the Board of Education*

decision of 1954 that declared school segregation unconstitutional. The Fourteenth Amendment would play a central role in defining and expanding individual rights for the next 60 years and beyond. ■

Suggested Reading

Curtis, *No State Shall Abridge*.

Epps, *Democracy Reborn*.

Foner, *Reconstruction*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did it take more than 80 years from the ratification of the Constitution for the United States to establish a definition of American citizenship?
2. Do you agree with the historians and legal scholars who claim the Fourteenth Amendment is the most significant amendment to the Constitution since the ratification of the Bill of Rights?

1868 Equal Protection—The 14th Amendment

Lecture 23—Transcript

Welcome back. Good to see you again. It's time once again to explore a key turning point in American history.

Let's start out by asking three basic questions: Who is an American? What rights are they entitled to? What entity is responsible for protecting those rights? Posing such questions in the 21st century would no doubt generate a lively debate and a wide range of answers. From a strictly legal standpoint, the answer to the first question is straightforward and uncomplicated: An American is any person born in the United States or to United States citizens abroad, or any person who migrates here and then becomes a naturalized citizen. Answers to the second question would certainly invoke many of the rights listed in the Bill of Rights: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom to bear arms, freedom from unlawful search and seizure, freedom from cruel and unusual punishment, and so forth. Pretty quickly, however, the conversation would probably turn to other rights that we often lump together under the heading of "civil rights": the right to vote, to hold office, and to serve on a jury; or the right to an education; or the right to legal representation. Eventually people would speak of the broad right to live free of restrictions based on race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. Finally, as to the third question of what entity is responsible for protecting these many, many rights, most people would point to the courts, especially the federal courts, as the guarantor of the many rights Americans hold dear.

In so doing—in so pointing to the federal courts—whether they knew it or not, they would be invoking a principle known as the "equal protection before the laws." This phrase is found not in the Declaration of Independence; it's not found in the Constitution or the Bill of Rights; it's found in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, an amendment ratified in 1868, 80 years after the Constitution. Many legal scholars, historians, and civil rights activists have argued that the 14th Amendment is the most important amendment added to the Constitution after the original 10 that comprised the Bill of Rights. So where did this 14th Amendment come from?

Before we begin to answer this question, let's establish some objectives for this lecture. We'll basically focus on four things: First, we'll trace the origins of the central idea behind the 14th Amendment; the idea of "Equal Rights for All." Then we'll move on to examine how the events of the Civil War and the early years of Reconstruction prodded Republicans in Congress to author the 14th Amendment. Then we'll explore how, in the years after Reconstruction, the 14th Amendment was reinterpreted so narrowly by the Supreme Court that it no longer protected the rights of African Americans, but rather those of big business. Finally, we'll examine the gradual resurrection of the real meaning of the 14th Amendment, which paved the way for the Civil Rights Movement and many other "rights" movements that followed in the mid-20th century.

OK, so let's return to our question: Where did the 14th Amendment come from? Strictly speaking, the 14th Amendment originated during Reconstruction, the period following the Civil War. But the central idea that lies at the heart of this amendment goes way back into the 1830s and the 1840s. This idea is equal rights for all. Certainly Americans shared a belief in equality that went back at least as far as 1776 when Thomas Jefferson penned those famous lines in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." But their understanding of this word "equality" back in that earlier period was very limited. It certainly did not apply to women; it didn't apply to slaves; or to Native Americans. It also didn't apply to many men. Remember from our lecture on universal suffrage how few men before, say, 1830 were allowed to vote. American society was full of exceptions to this idea of equality. That is, until a small but influential group of radicals began to make the outrageous claim that the fundamental meaning of American liberty, or America's experiment in republican government, was equal rights for all.

Who were these radicals making this outrageous claim? We've already met them in an earlier lecture: they're the abolitionists; men like William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass, and women like Abby Kelley Foster and Sojourner Truth. In that lecture on abolitionism, we focused primarily on the radical abolitionist demand for the immediate end to slavery; but today we need to look more closely, more deeply, into the core philosophy of radical abolitionism. It called for much more than just simply the end of slavery.

It insisted that all Americans, white or black, male or female, native-born or immigrant, were entitled to equal rights, and these equal rights included the right to vote, the right to hold office, the right to sign contracts, to own property, to serve on juries, to sue and be sued. They included the right to serve in the military, to live where one wanted, to work in the occupation of one's choosing. It meant, in short, equal rights for all.

Today, most Americans see these rights that we've just listed as basic and untouchable; but in the 1830s and 1840s they were considered dangerous and radical. Only a few Americans believed in this notion of equal rights for all. But then came the Civil War, and if there's one rule in history that's pretty consistent: War triggers radical, even revolutionary, changes; changes that few people expected just a little time before the war began, and usually that few wanted. The greatest of these revolutionary changes during the Civil War, of course, was Emancipation. Suddenly, nearly four million people held as slaves and held as property were now free. This unexpected development raised a compelling question in 1865, at the end of the war: What would be the status of these former slaves? Everyone agreed what these people were not: They're not slaves any longer. But that only answers one part of the question, and it leaves unanswered a whole host of questions. For example: Would African Americans be given full civil, social, political, and economic rights as citizens of the United States? Or would they be relegated to a serf-like status somewhere between a slave and a free citizen? This latter option might strike us in the 21st century as inconceivable; but in a society where most people did not enjoy full civil, social, economic, and political rights, this was actually a legitimate option.

There was also a second, closely-related question: What was the status of the Southern states; the former Confederate states? Would they be readmitted quickly in the hopes of putting the bloody war behind the nation? Or would there be an indefinite period of military occupation and reshaping of Southern society? Furthermore, would leaders of the Confederacy be pardoned or rehabilitated, or would they forfeit their political rights as punishment for leading the rebellion? The initial answers to these questions came in the first half of Reconstruction, the part I like to call the "Reconstruction Revolution." In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, most Southerners and many Northerners insisted that the former Confederate states be quickly

readmitted to the Union, and that formerly enslaved Africans be given their freedom and little more, certainly not citizenship and not equality. The man who embodied this view was President Andrew Johnson.

President Johnson hailed from Tennessee, and he rejected the idea of racial equality and any special effort on the part of the federal government to assist freedmen in their transition from slavery to freedom. Johnson, and people who thought the way he did, envisioned African Americans as a servile, peasant labor force with minimal legal rights and absolutely no civil, social, or political rights. So while Congress was out of session for much of 1865, President Johnson conducted what we might term “Rapid Reconstruction,” readmitting all the former Confederate states to the Union with minimal conditions. By December, 1865—just a few months after the war had ended—Johnson announced that Reconstruction was over; he’d done it.

But Northern Republicans, including a faction known as the Radical Republicans, along with most former slaves (or Freedmen, as they were called) rejected this easy and fast “all is forgiven” Reconstruction. They believed Reconstruction involved more than simply restoring the Union. It involved the eradication of all vestiges of slavery by granting full equality to African Americans and pledging federal authority to protect that equality. What drove them to this extraordinary conclusion were developments in the South that convinced them that radical measures were necessary; were in order. First, Northern Republicans were appalled in late 1865 to see many former Confederate leaders back in office in the South after the elections that took place in November, 1865. Second, they were shocked by reports of rampant violence by whites against blacks in the South, violence that largely went unpunished. Third, they were enraged by the passage of so-called “Black Codes” by Southern states, starting with Mississippi and with South Carolina in late 1865. These laws, these Black Codes, sharply limited the civil and economic rights of freedmen in order to turn them into basically a powerless and exploitable workforce.

Early in 1866, the Republican-dominated Congress came into session and passed the Civil Rights Bill. Most of us are familiar with the Civil Rights Acts in 1957, 1964, 1965, and 1968, but this was the first Civil Rights Act in American history. It marked the birth of civil rights as we understand

them today; civil rights not just for racial minorities, but for all Americans. What did this bill do? It declared that all persons born in the United States, including African Americans, were now citizens of the United States. Why is this important; why is this such a big deal? Believe it or not, up to this point in American history, there was no official definition of American citizenship. In fact, the most recent attempt to define American citizenship had been the infamous 1857 Supreme Court case known as Dred Scott. The Court's majority in that case had ruled that no African American, free or slave, could ever be a citizen of the United States. Let's listen to the key words from this decision: The Court argued that African Americans were "beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."

The Civil Rights Act 1866 essentially rejected that opinion. It also defined a specific rights all citizens, regardless of race, were entitled to. These included, most significantly, equality before the law. States were no longer permitted to make laws like Black Codes that limited the freedom and rights of groups like African Americans. All now enjoyed the equal protection of the law. The Civil Rights Act also prohibited states from restricting the rights of any citizens to make contracts, file lawsuits, and own property. Let's listen to the actual wording of this act:

That all persons born in the United States ... are hereby declared to be citizens of the United States; and such citizens, of every race and color, without regard to any previous condition of slavery or involuntary servitude ..., shall have the same right[s], in every State and Territory in the United States... as is enjoyed by white citizens.

A very, very clear, forceful statement about equality.

President Johnson, infuriated at Congress's rejection of his Reconstruction program and determined to thwart efforts to establish racial equality, vetoed the first Civil Rights Act. But Congress, dominated by Republicans, overrode the veto and it became law on April 9, 1866. Even before the ink was dry on this law, however, Republicans had come to the conclusion that stronger measures were necessary. One incident in particular prodded them

to this belief. On May 1 and 2, 1866, a brutal race riot erupted in Memphis, Tennessee. Angry whites rampaged through black neighborhoods, killing 46 blacks, most of them former Union army veterans. Local officials, when this was taking place, did nothing to stop the violence, and they gave very little indication that they would prosecute any of the culprits. News of this incident, which flooded Northern newspapers, aroused anger in the North and led Republicans to take the key ideas of the Civil Rights Act and write them into a constitutional amendment. The recently passed Civil Rights Bill was an unprecedented piece of legislation, but its supporters knew that it could easily be overturned by a future Congress. But an amendment, on the other hand, became a permanent part of the Constitution.

On June 13, 1866, moderate and Radical Republicans passed the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, and the 14th Amendment represented a radical redefinition of the role of the federal government as the guarantor of individual civil rights. Let's listen to one of its most important sections, section 1:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

In simple terms, the 14th Amendment meant the following: First, anyone born or naturalized in the United States was a citizen of the United States; and this definition, of course, included all freedmen, all African Americans who had formerly been slaves. Second, all citizens of the United States were entitled to "equal protection of the laws"; that is, states were prohibited from making laws that curtailed freedoms of any group of people. I like to tell students if you want any easy way to remember this provision, it means there's no second-class citizenship permitted in America. Third, any state that denied adult male citizens, a group that now included African American men, the right to vote would be penalized by having its representation in Congress reduced. Then, fourth, the 14th Amendment declared that all high-ranking

former Confederate officials were prohibited from holding public office unless pardoned by an act of Congress.

What did all this mean? Simply put, the 14th Amendment established the principle of equal rights for all, the vision first articulated by those radical abolitionists back in the 1830s and 1840s. Put another way, the 14th Amendment dramatically expanded the definition of the phrase, “We the People” at the start of the Constitution. The 14th Amendment also redefined the relationship of the federal government to its citizens and to the individual states. The final words of the Amendment read: “The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.” In other words, henceforth the federal government is the guarantor of the rights and the liberties enjoyed by the American people. We should point out here that the three amendments passed during Reconstruction—the 13th, 14th, and 15th—all had this lineament. All the amendments up to that point in American history had always said that Congress “shall not”; well now there’s a new spirit afoot, which is that Congress “shall,” Congress “must.” President Andrew Johnson went on a national speaking tour, urging the states to reject the 14th Amendment, but it was ratified by July, 1868. Two years later, recognizing that the 14th Amendment did not explicitly establish voting rights for all male citizens, Congress added the 15th Amendment, which asserted that no citizen could be denied the right to vote on the basis of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

In this early period of Reconstruction, the Republican Congress and the administration of President Ulysses Grant pursued a Reconstruction policy that reflected the spirit of this “equal rights for all” notion and the Constitutional obligations of the 14th Amendment. Perhaps the most significant was the use of federal authority to protect the rights of freedmen and their white allies. This was necessary due to the emergence in 1866 and 1867 of armed white vigilante groups that were committed to terrorizing freedmen and imposing white supremacy. These organizations went by many names, but the most infamous of them was very familiar to us: the Ku Klux Klan. By 1871, federal authorities had successfully suppressed much of this violence by vigilante groups like the Klan; and this policy allowed African Americans and their white Southern allies to establish what historian

Eric Foner, the foremost scholar of Reconstruction, has described as “the first great experiment in interracial democracy in history.”

African Americans joined fully in the political process, voting in great numbers and serving in many offices; and the results were remarkable (this is why I call this the “Reconstruction Revolution”): Between 1869 and 1901, 22 African Americans would serve in the U. S. Congress; 20 as representatives, 2 as senators. One African American served as governor. More than 600 African Americans won seats in state legislatures in the South and other state and local offices; and still hundreds more served in all kinds of other public jobs, from registrar of deeds to justice of the peace, and so on.

As many of you know, this experiment in interracial democracy was short-lived. I call this period, the next period, the “Reconstruction Counter-Revolution,” and we’ll discuss this in some detail in our next lecture. But for now, let’s summarize this counter-revolution: After about 1873, the federal government—which up until that point had been very active in upholding the 14th Amendment and civil rights in the South—backed off its commitment to democracy and equality in the South. Southerners soon took advantage of this opportunity, and one by one Reconstruction governments were replaced by so-called “redeemer” governments that quickly went about re-imposing white supremacy.

What about the 14th Amendment? The 14th Amendment, of course, remained part of the Constitution; but by the late 1870s, Congress chose not to enforce it. African Americans were stripped of their civil rights, including equality before the law and the right to vote. Then, a very conservative Supreme Court issued several opinions that did basically two things: First, the Court negated the equal rights purpose of the 14th Amendment when it came to race, and they did this by interpreting the 14th Amendment very, very narrowly, sharply restricting its guarantee of equal protection. In 1878, for example, in a case called *Hall v. DeCuir*, the Court ruled that a Louisiana law prohibiting racial discrimination on steamboats was unconstitutional because the vessel was engaged in interstate commerce (basically running routes between Louisiana and Mississippi), and interstate commerce was a realm of business that only Congress possessed the right to regulate; so they struck that antidiscrimination law down. Five years later, in 1883, in

what were called the “Civil Rights Cases,” the Supreme Court declared a Civil Rights Act of 1875—this is a subsequent Civil Rights Act that barred discrimination—unconstitutional, asserting that the 14th Amendment did not empower Congress to outlaw racial discrimination by private individuals and private organizations. Racial discrimination of this sort, the Court said, was “simply a private wrong.” This ruling cleared the way for private individuals such as hotel owners and institutions like men’s clubs to bar African Americans, but it still left standing the right of Congress to prohibit discrimination by state government institutions. Even that changed in 1896 in a well-known case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

In 1890, the state legislature of Louisiana passed a law requiring separate cars for black and white passengers on all railroads in the state. In response, a group of black activists decided to challenge this new law. One of their number was a young carpenter named Homer Plessy. He bought a first-class ticket on the East Louisiana Railroad and sat in the whites-only first-class car. As expected, he was arrested and taken before a judge; and Plessy argued before a local judge—a man named John H. Ferguson—that the new law, this new segregation law, violated the 13th Amendment’s prohibition of slavery and the 14th Amendment’s equal protection clause. Judge Ferguson ruled in favor of the railroad, stating that separation along racial lines did not violate Plessy’s rights. So Plessy appealed to the State Supreme Court, which in turn upheld Judge Ferguson’s decision. Then Homer Plessy appealed to the United States Supreme Court; and on May 18, 1896, the U. S. Supreme Court—by a vote of seven to one—rejected Plessy’s claim. Louisiana’s law was constitutional, argued the majority, because it was “reasonable” and in line with “established usages, customs, and traditions of the people.” The authors of the 13th and 14th Amendments, they said, never intended them to require full social equality of the races; and furthermore, they went on, legal separation of the races, in no way does this “stamp the colored race with a badge of inferiority.” This doctrine, subsequently known as “separate but equal,” asserted that separation was constitutional so long as states provided equal facilities for whites and for blacks.

Now let’s take a look at the second way in which the Supreme Court took the 14th Amendment in a very different direction from its original intent, and they did so by declaring that it established significant rights, not

for individual people, but for corporations. In 1886, the Supreme Court declared in the case *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad* that corporations were “de facto persons” and thus subject to all the protections under the 14th Amendment. Corporations were, they argued, collections of people, shareholders, so they deserved 14th Amendment protections. On one level, this interpretation made sense because it simplified the legal status of corporations. The government could collect taxes, for example, from a single corporation instead of having to collect them from many hundreds or thousands of individual shareholders. The same was true for lawsuits against corporations; you could lodge a single lawsuit against a company, not against its thousands of shareholders. But in subsequent decisions, the Supreme Court made it nearly impossible for state or local governments to impose any kind of regulations on corporations.

By 1900, the 14th Amendment—the amendment created to establish equal rights for all—had become a major asset to American big business titans, people like John D. Rockefeller, and had become an almost meaningless set of words for racial minorities. Talk about a strange and unexpected turn of events. But, as we shall see, the 14th Amendment never “died”; if we want to use that metaphor of dying, we could say that it maybe lapsed into a coma, if you will. But its key principles like “equal protection” remained in place, waiting for a subsequent generation of Americans to “revive” them.

The first important change came in the development of something called the “incorporation doctrine.” What does this mean, the incorporation doctrine? Up until the 1920s, the Supreme Court had ruled that the Bill of Rights applied only to the federal government, not the states. In other words, Congress could not limit free speech, it could also not limit religious freedom or the right to bear arms, but state governments did have that right to limit these freedoms. But this began to change in the 1920s: In 1925, the Court ruled in the case *Gitlow v. New York* that states were obligated to protect freedom of speech. The centerpiece of the Court’s reasoning was an assertion that the 14th Amendment’s “due process” clause “incorporated” all rights delineated in the Bill of Rights. In the coming decades, subsequent Supreme Court decisions gradually “incorporated” nearly all the key provisions of the Bill of Rights under the 14th Amendment; and as a result,

the 14th Amendment ensured that all Americans, regardless of the state they resided in, would enjoy the protections set forth in the Bill of Rights.

A second important change came through the revival of the “equal protection” clause of the 14th Amendment, to declare racial discrimination illegal. It started in 1938 with the case—it has kind of a clunky name—*Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (and “Canada” of course is not the country Canada, it’s a person named Canada). This case involved an African American student named Lloyd Gaines who applied to the whites-only law school at the University of Missouri. When his application was rejected solely because he was African American, he sued, and the case reached the Supreme Court. It ruled in his favor, and the Court argued that because Missouri offered law school education to white students but not to blacks, it violated the Equal Protection Clause. In a similar case a few years later, *Smith v. Allwright* in 1944, the Court declared that the practice of the Texas Democratic Party of restricting voting in primaries to whites only was also unconstitutional for the same reason: it violated equal protection. Two more cases in 1950 also saw the Court declare racial segregation in educational facilities unconstitutional on the basis of equal protection.

The big breakthrough case, of course, was the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. That case ruled segregation of schools unconstitutional; specifically, they argued that it violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. Let’s listen to how the Court put it, because the wording is quite famous, and for good reason. They ruled:

To separate [children in grade and high schools] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone. . . . We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

With that decision, the 14th Amendment was alive once again. In fact, it was more alive than ever and would play a central role in defining and expanding individual rights for the next 60 years and beyond. As I noted earlier, the

easiest way to understand this amendment is to think of it as standing against any form of second class citizenship. To cite just a couple notable cases after 1954 that sort of illustrate this point: In 1965, in a case called *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the Court struck down state laws prohibiting the use of contraceptives. In 1966, *Miranda v. Arizona*: that ruling determined that all persons arrested are entitled to certain rights, such as the right to remain silent and the right to an attorney. In 1967, a case *Loving v. Virginia*: that case declared unconstitutional state laws that prohibited interracial marriage. In 1973, *Roe v. Wade* struck down state restrictions on abortion. In 2003, *Lawrence v Texas* struck down Texas's anti-sodomy laws, which was a major victory for gay rights. Not surprisingly, advocates for gay marriage in the early 21st century base their claims on the notion that laws limiting marriage to heterosexual couples violates the 14th Amendment "equal protection" rights of homosexual couples.

It should be clear by now that the 14th Amendment is one of the most important amendments to the Constitution. Despite the fact that its equal rights for all spirit was suppressed for many decades from the 1880s to the 1940s, the 14th Amendment has served to broaden the definition of American equality more than any other legal provision, and that surely marks its ratification in 1868 as one of the great turning points in American history.

We'll have to leave this discussion of the 14th Amendment here. In our next lecture, we'll examine a very different kind of turning point in American history: the establishment of the national parks system. Thank you.

1872 Open Spaces—The National Parks

Lecture 24

Congress's establishment of Yellowstone National Park set the precedent for subsequent decisions, amidst the United States' greatest period of industrialization and modernization, to set aside 84 million acres of land for posterity. This effort flew in the face of American culture's longstanding commitment to private property and unrestricted development but created a unique and valuable American legacy.

In the early 1800s, Niagara Falls emerged as America's first great natural tourist attraction. But with tourists came opportunists who saw enormous profits to be made. Entrepreneurs quickly snapped up all the best property along the falls to build hotels, restaurants, viewing platforms, and so forth. Soon the surrounding area was transformed from a wonder of nature into America's first ugly tourist trap. For the growing number of 19th-century Americans who cared about preserving the nation's most beautiful natural wonders, the fate of Niagara Falls served as an ever-present cautionary tale.

Until the 1840s, most Americans viewed nature and the wilderness as either something threatening and dangerous or something to be used for man's betterment. The continent's vast hinterland was an economic opportunity, abundant with wood, meat, fish, fur, gold, silver, iron, coal, farmland, and grazing land. Few could imagine that nature might ever be exhausted. But there also emerged a countervailing voice of caution that argued for a more careful approach to nature.

Keep in mind that, before the 1860s, national parks did not exist anywhere in the world. Governments elsewhere had set aside large tracts of land, but for the pleasure of the aristocracy, not the masses.

In 1851, the first known European Americans ventured into an astonishingly vast and beautiful valley that they soon named Yosemite. James Mason Hutchings, an entrepreneur who saw tourist dollars in those vistas, wrote articles and sent photos to Congress that argued in favor of setting aside this land for public parks. Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, wrote

a stirring editorial calling for the government to save Yosemite’s 3,000-year-old giant sequoias from destruction.

In May 1864, California senator John Conness proposed giving California a large tract of federal land in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, including Yosemite and the Sequoia forest, for preservation as a park for “public use, resort, and recreation.” After almost no debate, both houses of Congress

passed the bill, and on June 30, 1864 President Abraham Lincoln signed it into law, creating America’s first state park.

Congress was willing to create a national park but not to fund its maintenance.

Although the park movement was driven by a desire to protect natural wonders from development,

business interests played a key role in establishing national parks. An ambitious Montana politician named Nathaniel P. Langford wrote a series of articles in popular magazines extolling the Yellowstone region’s extraordinary beauty and astonishing hot springs, arguing for its preservation as a park. Unbeknownst to nearly everyone, he was on the payroll of the Northern Pacific Railway Company, which saw Yellowstone’s tremendous potential for tourist revenue. The movement to declare Yellowstone a park gained momentum with a U.S. government expedition of surveyors, geologists, and botanists. A lobbyist for Northern Pacific convinced the expedition’s leader to include in his report an explicit call for turning Yellowstone into a national park. With remarkably little debate, in 1872, Congress passed a bill for Yellowstone to be “set apart as a public park ... for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.” President Grant promptly signed it, creating the world’s first national park.

From the moment these parks were established, commercial interests began to encroach on their beauty, resources, and character. The problem was that Congress was willing to create a national park but not to fund its maintenance. There was no authority present to stop hunters from killing wildlife or to stop businesses from setting up shop on park land to cater to tourists. Meanwhile, the Northern Pacific Railway Company had obtained

from Congress the rights to unlimited hunting, farming, grazing, and even mining on park lands in exchange for a nominal annual fee.

Advocates of wilderness preservation began lobbying Congress to take action. A bitter fight ensued. Congress eventually appropriated \$40,000 for the park's administration and sharply curtailed the lucrative special deals for the Northern Pacific. In 1886, Congress eliminated all funding for Yellowstone. But disaster was averted by General Philip Sheridan, a Civil War hero, who offered to station some of his troops there to enforce order. The cavalry stayed there for more than 30 years.

Yosemite faced similar threats from meddling politicians and hungry business interests. In 1889, conservationist John Muir launched a campaign to have the entire region transformed into a national park. In October 1890, President Harrison signed a bill establishing the 900,000-acre Yosemite National Park. From this point forward, the national parks idea gained momentum, as did the movement to create national forests, protect wildlife, and preserve special natural monuments like Devil's Tower in Wyoming. The greatest advances in this effort were made under Theodore Roosevelt, an avid outdoorsman. Millions more acres of federal and state land would become national parks throughout the 20th century.

The advocates of wilderness preservation and national parks acted at just the right moment—at the moment when industrial capitalism operated with unprecedented freedom. Had they failed, there would have been no way to recover what was lost. ■

Suggested Reading

Duncan and Burns. *The National Parks*.

Questions to Consider

1. Is there an inherent conflict in a capitalist society between the property rights of the individual and the rights of the wider community?

2. Does the story of the national parks movement confirm the idea that history is often made by groups of relatively powerless people who exert agency to achieve significant and lasting change?

1872 Open Spaces—The National Parks

Lecture 24—Transcript

Welcome back. It's time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Today, we look at the movement, amidst the greatest period of industrialization and modernization, to preserve for all time large sections of wilderness as national parks. As we'll see, this was a radical idea at the time, but it eventually caught on and spread.

Let's start out by taking a look at Niagara Falls, near Buffalo, New York. In the early 1800s, Niagara Falls emerged as America's first great nature attraction, and there was really nothing quite like it. When the Transportation Revolution that we talked about in an earlier lecture took place and made it easier to get to Niagara Falls, it meant ever-rising numbers of tourists heading in that direction. But with tourists came opportunists, who saw in the great falls enormous profits to be made. Entrepreneurs quickly snapped up all the best property along the falls, and there they built hotels, restaurants, viewing platforms, museums, and so forth; so the surrounding area around the great falls was transformed from a wonder of nature into a gaudy, tacky, overpriced honky-tonk. There are many great cartoons that capture this; that show the place as just being completely corrupted. One visitor in 1847 reported, "Now the neighborhood of the great wonder is overrun with every species of abominable fungus." He put it pretty blunt, huh? In 1871, things hadn't gotten much better. The writer Henry James visited and he decried the town's "horribly vulgar shops and booths and catchpenny artifices." Niagara Falls, in short, had become America's first ugly tourist trap; and for the growing number of Americans in the mid-19th century who cared about preserving America's most beautiful natural wonders, the fate of Niagara Falls served as an ever-present cautionary tale. It would stand in their minds of the supreme example of exactly what they did not want to happen in places like Yosemite Valley in California and Yellowstone in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho.

Before we go any further into this incredible story of how a small group of Americans in the early years after the Civil War successfully championed the idea of creating national parks, let's set out the objectives for this lecture. We'll focus on four things: First, we'll look at how Americans

developed two competing ideas of nature in the antebellum period. Next, we'll examine how a few men in the 1860s and 1870s led the successful campaign to establish Yosemite and Yellowstone National Parks. Then, we'll explore the long and bitter fight to preserve these parks from development and exploitation. Then finally, we'll examine how this tradition of creating national parks eventually took hold and spread in the 20th century, creating a uniquely American legacy.

Let's start by considering the different ways in which Americans viewed nature. For most of American history up to the 1840s, most Americans viewed nature and the wilderness as something to be used for man's betterment. They looked at the continent's vast hinterland and saw economic opportunity. Specifically, they saw wood, meat, fish, fur, gold, silver, iron, coal, farmland, grazing land; they saw everything. With such small populations of Euro-Americans and Native Americans—by “small,” I mean small in proportion to the land that was available—few people could imagine that nature might ever be exhausted; that there ever might be a downside to the unrestrained cutting down of trees, or trapping of animals, or mining for minerals, or tilling of farmland. In fact, many Americans in these years before 1860 viewed the nation's abundant resources as a sign from God that he favored their experiment in republican government.

This notion of nature as a storehouse of potential wealth grew in intensity as more and more settlers began striking out for the great American West beyond the Mississippi River. Let's listen to an excellent expression of this view from a guidebook written to entice pioneers to set out on the Oregon Trail in the 1840s. Its author was a man named Lansford W. Hastings, and he wrote rapturously of the American West as a place of inexhaustible resources placed there by God to promote the prosperity and happiness of the republic. He wrote:

I cannot but believe that the time is not distant, when those wild forests, trackless plains, untrodden valleys, and the unbounded ocean will present one grand scene of continuous improvements, universal enterprise, and unparalleled commerce: when those vast forests shall have disappeared before the hardy pioneer; those extensive plains shall abound with innumerable herds of domestic

animals; those fertile valleys shall groan under the immense weight of their abundant products: when those numerous rivers shall teem with countless steamboats ... when the entire country will be everywhere intersected with turnpike roads, railroads and canals; and when all the vastly numerous and rich resources of that now almost unknown region will be fully and advantageously developed.

He said this was “the march of civilization.” This was pretty enthusiastic, saying, “This is all there for the taking; let’s make it happen.”

But even as he was saying this, there were other voices emerging that offered kind of a countervailing and cautionary warning about the possibility that we might go too far, and that we should be careful about how we treat nature. One of the most forceful expressions of this view came from a man named George Perkins Marsh. In 1864, he published a widely-read book entitled *Man and Nature* in which he condemned America’s destruction of their natural resources. Humanity, he argued, had forgotten that nature’s resources were given to them by God for careful use and management, not merely for consumption and definitely not for wasting. Let’s listen to what he said. In 1864 he wrote:

But man is everywhere a disturbing agent. Wherever he plants his foot, the harmonies of nature are turned to discords. Indigenous vegetable and animal species are extirpated, and supplanted by others of foreign origin. ... The terrible destructiveness of man is remarkably exemplified in the chase of large mammalia and birds for single products. ... [T]he buffalo of North America is slaughtered merely for his skin or his tongue.

Marsh decried this practice as reckless squandering of precious resources; and he also wrote of man’s shortsightedness, citing, for example, the long-term effects of clear cutting forests. This triggered rapid erosion of the soil, turning a region into what he said was “an assemblage of bald mountains, of barren, turfless hills, and of swampy and malarious plains.” To be sure, Marsh’s view was not shared by most Americans in the mid-19th century; in fact, his view of nature and the interconnectedness of ecosystems would not become mainstream until the birth of the modern environmental movement

in the late 1960s, something we'll talk about in a future lecture. But the essence of Marsh's warning that human beings needed to think about nature not as infinite and self-sustaining but rather as something that's fragile and finite gradually gained a following.

So, too, did another view on nature propagated by intellectuals, artists, novelists, and reformers. In the mid-19th century, as the Industrial Revolution propelled America into the modernizing world that's fact-paced, urban, and more and more dependent on technology—things like steam engines and telegraphs—it inspired a widespread reverence for its opposite, which was nature; and we see this in Henry David Thoreau's famous book *Walden*, first published in 1854. We also see it in the sweeping romantic landscapes of the Hudson River School painters, people like Thomas Cole and Asher Durand. You've probably seen some of these paintings; they're huge, sweeping landscapes of rivers, valleys, mountain ranges, all kind of conveying the basic point that nature is awe-inspiring creation and it's far greater than anything manmade, even tall buildings and locomotives. We also see a growing reverence for nature in the urban park movement, essentially an effort to bring nature into cities by establishing parks. New York's Central Park, which was started in the 1850s, is the best example of this effort, and it was soon copied in nearly every city in the country.

Promoters of this deep reverence for nature argued that nature offered a release and an escape from their troubles and the stresses of modern life. Factories, locomotives, steamboats, newspapers, and telegraphs brought many benefits, but they were all manmade and therefore they were unnatural. Human beings, they said, needed at the very least to find ways to commune with nature to restore their minds and their souls. Nature represented health, vigor, sanity, and serenity. As Thoreau wrote in his famous book *Walden*, "We need the tonic of wilderness. ... We can never have enough of nature."

Ok, you get the idea. By the 1850s, there were two competing notions of nature: One saw it as a storehouse of profit and opportunity, something for human beings to exploit; and the other saw nature as the antitheses of modernity, development, industrialization, and urbanization. It was something to be cherished and preserved; not all of it, but a significant amount of the most important pieces. With that in mind, let's now turn

our attention to examining how a few men in the 1860s and 1870s led the successful campaign to establish Yosemite and Yellowstone National Parks. This, by the way, is a great example of agency, a theme we've talked about in several other lectures; of people setting goals and moving history by sheer force of will.

The first thing we should understand here is that national parks did not exist anywhere in the world at this time. In most of the world—certainly in Europe—governments had set aside large tracts of land, but they had done so for the pleasure of the aristocracy, not for the masses. The story we're about to tell here represents another one of those radical ideas that have changed American history: ideas like freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and universal suffrage; things we've talked about in other lectures. It all started in the mid-1850s in California, the nation's newest state. In 1851, the first known Euro-Americans ventured into an astonishingly vast and beautiful valley that they soon named Yosemite. Four years later, another expedition arrived for a more extensive look; and the leader of this trip wrote when looking at the awe-inspiring Yosemite Falls, "If man ever feels his utter insignificance at any time, it is when looking upon such a scene of appalling grandeur." I love that phrase, "appalling grandeur." By then, explorers in the region had discovered perhaps its most astonishing feature: Giant Sequoia trees, 3,000 years old. These were the largest at nearly 300 feet in height and the oldest living things on Earth.

On this and subsequent expeditions, artists and photographers came along to create vivid images of Yosemite's beauty that then sent them back East to a thrilled audience of Americans that simply could not get enough of them, these paintings and these photographs. One was a photographer named Carlton E. Watkins, and he soon became nationally famous for his stunning photographs of Yosemite's natural wonders. Another was the painter Albert Bierstadt. He, too, would become nationally famous for his epic paintings of Yosemite; in fact, he's sort of the leading figure in what was called the "Rocky Mountain School." You've probably seen some of these scenes of just spectacular landscapes and sunsets and sweeping mountains. Here, in talking about photographers and artists, we see one of the most important keys to the parks movement: The great mass of Americans back East and their representatives in Washington, D.C. needed images of these natural

wonders if they were ever to go visit these places and, most importantly, if they were to support legislation setting aside the land for public parks; so people in the East with the power and the money needed to see what's out there and see the value in it before they'd support efforts to save it.

Even though very few people made it to see Yosemite in those early years—records show it's probably less than a hundred people per year—popular support began to grow for preserving the valley and the Giant Sequoias. Support also came from business interests in California; entrepreneurs who saw tourist dollars in those Yosemite trees, rock formations, rivers, and wild animals. Here we see a theme that will be repeated in the establishment of subsequent national parks: Even though the parks movement was driven by a desire to preserve nature's wonders from the threat posed by industrial capitalism, the fact remains that business interests played a key role in prodding Congress to establish parks.

In 1864, several California businessmen lobbied Congress and Congress responded. In May, 1864—remember, this is right in the middle of the Civil War—California Senator John Conness proposed a bill to give California a large tract of federal land in the Sierra Nevada Mountains that included Yosemite and the Giant Sequoia forest, and they did so (the legislation) provided that California preserve it from development and maintain it as a park for all “public use, resort, and recreation.” The region, he said, included “some of the greatest wonders of the world.” After almost no debate, both houses of Congress passed the bill, and on June 30, 1864, President Abraham Lincoln signed it into law. This law made history, because up to this point no government in the world had ever set aside a vast area of natural beauty for the public's use and enjoyment; and this unique aspect of America's wilderness parks points to their fundamentally democratic nature. These reserves, advocates emphasized, were for the people, now and in future generations. This idea of parks as expressions of democratic values would become very important in the coming years when wilderness parks, as we shall see, were threatened by commercial interests.

But first we need to examine the second important development in the creation of the national parks system: the exploration and popularization of an extraordinary place called Yellowstone, located in modern-day Wyoming,

Montana, and Idaho. Until the early 1870s, only a small number of Euro-Americans had ever set foot in the region called Yellowstone, and the stories they told of boiling lakes and shooting spouts of water and steam were dismissed as wild rumors; nobody believed them. But in 1870, an expedition into Yellowstone led by an ambitious Montana politician named Nathaniel P. Langford led to a series of articles in popular magazines and a successful national lecture tour. Whether he was writing or speaking, Langford told of the extraordinary beauty of the area and its astonishing hot springs. He wrote that while Niagara Falls and Yosemite were remarkable works of nature ... let's actually listen to what he had to say. He said these are fine and amazing things, but there's just something. ... Yellowstone is on a whole new level:

Amid the canyon and falls, the boiling springs and sulfur mountain, and, above all, the mud volcano and the geysers of [the] Yellowstone, your memory becomes filled and clogged with objects new in experience, wonderful in extent, and possessing unlimited grandeur and beauty.

A pretty rhapsodic description. Langford argued that Yellowstone had to be preserved as a park; and part of his motivation was not merely his love of nature, but also—as we've seen before—his love of money. Unbeknownst to nearly everyone, he was on the payroll of the giant Northern Pacific Railroad. That railroad saw in Yellowstone a tremendous source of revenue from tourists who would be eager to explore its wonders. Just as was the case with Yosemite, some of the park's most zealous backers were actually business interests.

The move to declare Yellowstone a park gained momentum the next year when an official U.S. government expedition led by the geologist Ferdinand V. Hayden arrived. Significantly, along with his team of surveyors, geologists, and botanists was a photographer named William Henry Jackson. He took a series of photographs of Yellowstone's high peaks, thick forests, spouting geysers, and boiling lakes and these quickly garnered a huge audience back East, including members of Congress. Along with Jackson there was a painter named Thomas Moran, and he, like Bierstadt before him, painted vivid landscapes that just stunned people when they were brought back East. Congress even paid \$10,000 for one of Moran's paintings.

When Hayden returned to Washington, he submitted a report that called for turning Yellowstone into a national park, and in so doing he extolled the beauty of Yellowstone and warned Congress not to let this place become another Niagara Falls. There's a hitch, though, because Wyoming was not yet a state, so Congress couldn't simply hand the park over as it did in the case of Yosemite; so it had to be made a park by Congress. With remarkably little debate, in 1872 Congress passed the bill calling for Yellowstone to be withdrawn from development and instead "set apart as a public park for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." President Grant promptly signed it, creating the world's first national park.

Now that these parks have been established, are we at the end of the story? Does this idea simply spread throughout the country, leaving us the legacy we have now of over 84 million acres of national parks? Not by a long shot, because from the moment these parks were established, commercial interests began to encroach on their beauty, their resources, and their character; and this began what I like to call "round two" of the fight to preserve wilderness from development and exploitation.

We need to pause here to introduce another vital element to this story, the story of the national parks system, and it's the emergence of a man named John Muir. Muir would become in this period the best-known and most successful conservationist in American history. John Muir was born in Scotland in 1838, and when he was 11 he emigrated to the United States with his family. The Muirs settled in Wisconsin and took up farming, like lots of immigrants. By all accounts, Muir's life was a hard one. His father was a sometimes-minister who preached a hard, fire-and-brimstone version of Christianity. He required his wife and children to work really long hours and to fill their spare time memorizing the Bible; in fact, John Muir I think memorized two-thirds of the Bible and could recite it at will. Muir finally grew up and moved away. He went off to college, but only stayed for three years. He eventually quit and hit the road in search of work and adventure; and this is kind of a clue into the lifestyle that he'll lead, he's very restless. The turning point in his life came in 1867 when he was temporarily blinded in a workshop accident. It took a month for him to get his sight back, and when he did get it back he vowed to hit the road again and to study what

really interested him, natural science, and to work in the great outdoors, the place that he loved.

For several years, John Muir walked the country, supporting himself by doing odd jobs; sort of an early hippie, I guess. Eventually, in 1868, he landed in California and soon found himself in Yosemite Valley. To say that John Muir fell in love with the natural beauty and wonders of Yosemite would be a serious understatement. He worked there for a time as a shepherd and then operating a sawmill, but in his spare time he explored, up the high peaks, down into the deep forests; he studied and admired the grand rock formations and the smallest specimens of moss. He wrote, "I am [a] captive, I am bound. Love of pure unblemished Nature seems to overmaster and blur out of sight all other objects and considerations."

At the center of Muir's understanding of nature was that it revealed the work of God; but this was a very different kind of theology from his father's hard-line Puritanism. Muir's theology of nature was more like what we'd call humanistic or, I guess, New Age. Everywhere in his writings he invoked spiritual terms and metaphors to describe his surroundings. Yosemite Valley, he said, was "It is by far the grandest of all the special temples of Nature I was ever permitted to enter." He also called it the "sanctum sanctorum" of the Sierras. John Muir spoke of tree groves as "cathedrals." He also said at one point after camping on a glacier, "Any man who does not believe in God and glaciers is the worst kind of unbeliever." Later, when he first saw Yellowstone, he wrote, "Take a look into the grand geological library of the park and see how God writes history." You can see he's spiritual, but in a different way.

After five years exploring in the Yosemite and developing a reputation as an expert guide, John Muir took up a pen and began to write about what he saw. Beginning in 1874, his articles began appearing in popular magazines like *Overland Monthly* and *Harper's Weekly*; and before long, John Muir became the nation's foremost nature writer and the nation's foremost advocate for preserving America's natural resources. This effort by Muir would become extremely important as these early wilderness parks soon came under threat from commercial interests. The problem here was that Congress seemed willing to create national parks but not to provide any money for their

maintenance; so in the early years of Yellowstone, there was no authority to stop hunters from killing wildlife. In one year, 4,000 elk were killed by hunters. And there was nobody there to stop businesses from setting up shop on parkland to cater to tourists; people actually built hotels and restaurants on parkland. For a time, the park's remoteness minimized the problem. But when the Northern Pacific Railroad was completed in 1883, it unleashed a rising tide of tourists, hunters, and entrepreneurs into the region; and the Northern Pacific Railroad also had used its influence in Congress to gain special deals. They got a deal for the unlimited rights to hunting, farming, grazing, and even mining on park lands in exchange for a very nominal fee. The railroad also secured seven huge parcels of land within the park, and they were allowed to develop it as they saw fit (and they were probably going to build hotels).

Back East, this alarmed people; and the editor of a popular magazine, *Forest and Stream*, began to sound the alarm. If Congress did not act soon to rescind these outrageous giveaways, he said, Yellowstone would be turned into "a second Niagara" (I told you, Niagara sort of stands in their minds as the worst-case scenario). Soon, likeminded advocates of wilderness preservation began lobbying Congress to take action and a bitter fight ensued. Opponents of the park argued that public parks and national parks should just simply be done away with; they're a waste of time and money. Senator John Ingalls of Kansas said, "The best thing the Government could do with the Yellowstone National Park is to survey it and sell it as other public lands are sold." But there were other voices, equally determined to save Yellowstone. Let's listen to one of them; it's Senator George Vest of Missouri. He stood up after hearing his colleague call for the selling of Yellowstone; he said:

The great curse of this age and of the American people is its materialistic tendency. Money, money is the cry everywhere. ... I am not ashamed to say that I shall vote to perpetuate this park for the American people. I am not ashamed to say that I think its existence answers a great purpose in national life.

He went on to say that the great purpose was "a great breathing place for the national lungs." His vision wins out: Congress eventually appropriated \$40,000 for the park's administration and it sharply curtailed those

giveaways it had given to the Northern Pacific Railroad. It also fended off another railroad's attempt to run railroad lines through the park; so the park was saved.

But things change, right? In 1886, Congress eliminated all the funding for the park, and the only thing that saved it from disaster—from hunters and opportunists moving in—was an unlikely hero: General Philip Sheridan, the Civil War general of great fame, headed a large portion of the U.S. Army in the West and he was a big fan of national parks. He offered to the park's administrator to station some of his troops there, some of the U.S. Cavalry there. They accepted his offer, and the Cavalry actually ended up staying more than 30 years, basically as the park police.

At the same time that Yellowstone's fate hung in the balance, the great Yosemite Park in California faced a similar threat from meddling politicians and hungry business interests. In 1889, John Muir returned to Yosemite for the first time in years and he was shocked by what he found: hotels, trash, tunnels through the Giant Sequoia trees' roots. He found pig farms and, worse, huge numbers of sheep, which he realized pretty quickly were going to do serious damage. He called them "hoofed locusts"; it's a great phrase. The same is true of the high country in the mountains surrounding the park; people had begun to move in. Muir was horrified, and he soon launched a campaign to have the entire region—not just Yellowstone, but the whole surrounding region—turned into a national park. The plan, as it did elsewhere, encountered fierce opposition from business interests and their political allies in Washington and in California; but by now, John Muir enjoyed national fame. He was able to line up a number of key Washington officials to get onto his side, and he soon published a number of articles promoting the idea to the wider public; and so almost singlehandedly—although there were a lot of people involved—John Muir brings it to the point of October, 1890, when President Harrison has on his desk a bill establishing the Yosemite National Park, and he signs it. It was huge: 900,000 acres; 30 times the original size of Yosemite. At nearly the same time, Congress in 1890 also established two other national parks in California: Sequoia National Park and General Grant National Park.

From this point forward, the national parks idea gained momentum. So, too, did related initiatives in the early 1890s and early 20th century such as the first acts by Congress to create national forests, protect wildlife, and preserve national monuments, like Devil's Tower in Wyoming. The greatest advances in this effort were made under President Theodore Roosevelt. He was an avid outdoorsman and supported the idea of preserving wilderness areas for the enjoyment of future generations of Americans. He even spent three nights camping in Yosemite with John Muir. You may have seen the photo of the two of them standing out on a high rock overlooking the valley. During his nearly eight years in office, Roosevelt established the United States Forest Service; he created five national parks; 18 national monuments; 51 bird reserves; four game reserves; and 150 national forests. In all, he set aside 230 million acres of land and millions more federal land would be added in the coming decades of the 20th century. We should also point out that state governments were doing the same thing, so even more land was being set aside for public use as parkland.

What was the result? In 1920, visitors to the national parks topped 1 million for the first time. In 1941, it topped 21 million; in 1960, 80 million; and in 2007, more than 275 million visitors went to America's national parks. This was not an easy process, and the parks movement faced challenges every step of the way. But the idea that began in Yosemite in 1864 and then became reality in 1872 with the establishment of the nation's first national park in Yellowstone had by the early 20th century become a unique and enduring American tradition, one without parallel in the world. Looking back from the early 21st century, we can appreciate the significance of this achievement; we can see why it constituted a turning point in American history. The advocates of wilderness preservation and national parks acted at just the right moment; at the moment when industrial capitalism operated with unprecedented freedom. If they had failed, there would have been no way to recover what was lost.

Let's leave the last word on this story to the great novelist and Western writer Wallace Stegner. He was not only a great novelist; he was a great believer in the outdoors and the idea of parks and so forth. He wrote:

The national park idea, the best idea we ever had, was inevitable as soon as Americans learned to confront the wild continent not with fear and cupidity but with delight, wonder, and awe. Once started, it grew like the backfire it truly was, burning back upwind against the current of claim and grab and raid ... showing that our rapacious society could hold its hand, at least in the presence of stupendous scenery, and learn to respect the earth for something besides its economic value.

We'll have to leave it there in this discussion of the creation of the national parks. For our next lecture, we'll turn our attention from the American West to the American South to explore the story of the overthrow of Reconstruction. Thank you.

1873 Bloody Sunday—Ending Reconstruction

Lecture 25

Despite the achievements of the early years of Reconstruction, Southerners remained committed to removing federal authority and reimposing white supremacy. This effort began in earnest on Easter Sunday, 1873, when white vigilantes in Colfax, Louisiana massacred 150 African Americans. The Colfax Massacre elicited no meaningful response from the federal government. By 1877, Reconstruction had ended, replaced by a system of racial oppression and exclusion known as Jim Crow, which lasted until the 1950s.

On February 25, 1870, Hiram Rhodes Revels, a former minister from Mississippi, was officially seated as the first African American member of the U.S. Senate. Only five years earlier, most African Americans in the United States had been slaves. This was evidence of the success of the first half of the Reconstruction period, from roughly 1865 to 1872—Reconstruction as revolution. Unfortunately, this success was not to last.

During the early Reconstruction, Northern Radical Republicans believed the time had come to eradicate all vestiges of slavery and remake the South in the image of the North. They refused to readmit Southern states to the Union and their elected representatives to Congress; passed the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments; and developed a state readmission plan that barred most former Confederates from voting and office-holding and required state ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.

One of the first things freedmen did was build a vast network of black churches where they could practice the expressive worship style they preferred, led by black clergymen who could address their spiritual and social needs. These churches quickly assumed a central place in the lives of freedmen, running schools and providing charitable services to the community. African Americans also built 3,000 schools across the South by 1870, serving 150,000 students of all ages and established more than a dozen black colleges.

Freedmen flocked to the Republican Party, and between 1869 and 1901, 22 African Americans would serve in the U.S. Congress; one African American served as governor (P. B. S. Pinchback of Louisiana); and more than 600 freedmen won seats in state and local offices. Republican-controlled Southern governments instituted many public works projects, established hospitals and orphanages, and built thousands of schools. They also established more equitable tax codes and passed laws to help indebted farmers keep their land.

Meanwhile, the majority of white Southerners waited for an opportunity to retake power. Their chance came in the early 1870s when the federal government's commitment to upholding equal protection in the South began to wane, thanks to scandals in the Grant administration and the depression set off by the Panic of 1873. Organized white resistance—both legal and illegal—to Republican rule arose.

United States v. Cruikshank ...
essentially ended the federal
government's ability to protect
freedmen in the South.

After a disputed election for governor of Louisiana in 1872, a Republican federal judge ruled that William P. Kellogg and the Republican-majority legislature

be seated. The Democratic candidate, John McEnery, established a rival administration in New Orleans, backed by a paramilitary, Klan-like organization called the White League—essentially the military wing of the state's Democratic Party.

Meanwhile, in Grant Parish, with its seat at Colfax, two Democrats claimed victory in races for sheriff and judge. Kellogg's administration declared two Republicans the winners. The Republicans ousted the Democrats on March 25, 1873, and a group of armed African Americans guarded the courthouse for them. A large force of armed white Democrats led by Christopher Columbus Nash marched on the courthouse. On Easter Sunday, April 13, 1873, Nash ordered the courthouse defenders to disband. When they refused, Nash's men overran the defenders and killed nearly one hundred freedmen. About 50 freedmen fled but were captured and butchered.

The federal government prosecuted and convicted a few perpetrators of this Colfax Massacre under the Enforcement Act of 1870, but they were subsequently freed in the wake of a landmark Supreme Court case *United States v. Cruikshank*, which ruled that protections of the Fourteenth Amendment only applied to the actions of state governments and not to the actions of individuals. This decision essentially ended the federal government's ability to protect freedmen in the South.

The message of the Colfax Massacre—that the Democratic Party could employ terroristic violence with impunity spread to other states of the former Confederacy, reaching full development with a carefully organized campaign of terror: the Mississippi Plan. Threats, beatings, and killings were used to threaten blacks and whites who might dare to vote Republican. The Democrats swept to victory in Mississippi and took control of the state legislature for the first time since the Civil War. Other Southern states soon employed their own versions of the Mississippi Plan. One by one the remaining Reconstruction governments fell to a new class of political leaders known as Redeemers.

The 1880s and 1890s saw the creation of what came to be known as the Jim Crow South. Most African Americans were forced into lives of rural poverty under the sharecropping system, mired in a never-ending cycle of poverty and debt. Many private businesses—notably railroads, ferries, and hotels—adopted segregation. Shortly, the states imposed these policies on public facilities such as schools and hospitals as well. A conservative Supreme Court upheld these acts under the so-called separate but equal doctrine. Finally, blacks were almost completely robbed of the vote through grandfather clauses, poll taxes, and literacy tests.

So even though the cause of African American freedom—and by extension, American freedom as a whole—suffered these major setbacks in the late 19th century, the Reconstruction amendments remained part of the Constitution, ready to be reinvigorated and honored in the 1950s and 1960s during the civil rights movement. ■

Suggested Reading

Foner, *Reconstruction*.

Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*.

Lane, *The Day Freedom Died*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did the federal government pull back from its commitment to democracy, equality, and freedom during Reconstruction in the early 1870s?
2. Are there any lessons to draw from viewing Reconstruction as two stories, one of revolution and another of counterrevolution?

1873 Bloody Sunday—Ending Reconstruction

Lecture 25—Transcript

Welcome back. Today, we explore a key turning point in American history from the period of the 1870s known as Reconstruction. Let's begin with a two-part story involving a man named "Print" Matthews.

Print Matthews was born into a prominent slaveholding family in Mississippi in 1840. Matthews nonetheless grew up to become a Union sympathizer during the Civil War; and later, during Reconstruction, Matthews became a Republican political leader. He formed a successful coalition of African Americans and small-time white landowners in Copiah County, Mississippi. He eventually won election as county sheriff. So in many ways, Matthews represented the promise of Reconstruction, where white and black Southerners would work together to participate in a multiracial democracy. But now let's jump ahead to 1883: By now, Reconstruction was over. In particular, this meant the withdrawal of federal troops and federal authorities willing to protect the voting rights of African Americans and their white allies. Blacks faced increasing violence and intimidation from white supremacists committed to stripping away black political rights. Print Matthews, however, refused to give up, or to bow to threats against his life, and there were many. On Election Day in 1883, he went to the polls to cast his ballot. But his Democratic political opponent was there; he pulled out a shotgun and killed him. Print Matthews's killer went free and went on to have a very successful political career.

What happened? Before we set out to answer this question, let's establish our objectives for this lecture. We'll focus on three primary things: First, we'll briefly look at the first half of Reconstruction, the period roughly from about 1865–1872; the period I like to call the "Reconstruction Revolution." Second, we'll examine the second half of Reconstruction, roughly 1873–1877, the period I will characterize as the "Counter-Revolution"; and we'll focus in this period on a particular key event: the Colfax Massacre. Then finally, we'll detail how a multiracial democracy like Reconstruction was replaced after this period by an oppressive system known as "Jim Crow."

Let's start with a brief review of the first half of Reconstruction, the period I call the "Reconstruction Revolution." You may recall from our previous lecture on the 14th Amendment that we covered some aspects of this story; but it's a long and complicated story, so it's worth a quick review. You may remember that there were several key questions in the air in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War: First and foremost, what was the status of the Southern states? They had broken away; what's their status now vis-à-vis the Union? Second, and in some ways more compelling, what was the status of the four million African Americans who were formerly held as slaves? Clearly they're not slaves anymore, but what's their status? On the first question, most Southerners and many Northerners insisted on a quick readmission of Southern states with very few strings attached. On the second question, many of them also argued that formerly enslaved African Americans should get their freedom, but that's it. But a group of committed Northern Republicans—sometimes called Radical Republicans—along with most former slaves, or Freedmen as they were often called, had a different vision. They believed the time had come to eradicate all vestiges of slavery and to make the South, as much as they could, in the image of the North.

To accomplish this goal, they did a number of things. First, they passed and saw ratified three key amendments to the Constitution: The 13th Amendment abolished slavery. The 14th Amendment, as we know from our last lecture, did many important things. Most importantly, it established a definition of citizenship that included African Americans; it also established the principle of equal protection before the law. Then the 15th Amendment said that no one could be denied the right to vote on the basis of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The second reform that these Radical Republicans pushed for was that they authorized and funded the Freedmen's Bureau. The Freedmen's Bureau was essentially an all-purpose relief organization, kind of like the Red Cross, and it offered immediate help to starving and homeless Southerners; it also established schools and provided legal services. Finally, these Republicans prodded the Grant administration to live up to the obligations it had under the 14th and 15th Amendments by using the power of the federal government to protect the rights of freedmen. This was especially important by the late 1860s when armed white vigilante groups like the Ku Klux Klan arose to terrorize freedmen and re-impose white supremacy. By 1871, through the Enforcement Act and also through the Ku Klux

Klan Act of 1871, federal authorities succeeded in crushing the Klan and similar groups.

What was the result of this Republican program? Simply put, it was a revolution with profound social and economic consequences. In essence, the Reconstruction Revolution created space for African Americans to make the most of their new freedoms. It led to political empowerment, first and foremost through voting; African Americans exercised their right to vote and exerted political power. They also took advantage of office holding. Between 1869 and 1901, 22 African Americans served in Congress; 600 freedmen won seats in state legislatures and other important state and local offices. The Reconstruction Revolution also allowed for community building; so African Americans had the opportunity to build thousands of churches and hundreds of schools. On this last score, literacy rates jumped. In 1875, the literacy rate—10 years since the war—had jumped from 10 percent at the end of the war to 30 percent; a pretty astonishing accomplishment. If you stopped the clock in 1872 or so, Reconstruction was unquestionably a revolution. But, as we know from history—especially, I hope anyway, from these lectures—history hits sudden turning points, usually without warning. With this in mind, let's turn to the changing politics of the early 1870s that led the federal government to pull back from this commitment to protecting freedom and democracy in the postwar South.

What happened? To start with, we need to be clear on one thing: Most white Southerners hated this Reconstruction Revolution; they seethed under it. This is only natural. They waited for an opportunity to retake power. More precisely, they waited to stage a Counter-Revolution; and that chance came in the early 1870s when the federal government's commitment to maintaining law and order and to upholding equal protection before the law in the South began to wane.

Why did this happen? Why did the Northern commitment to freedom and democracy in the South, which at one point was really strong, suddenly start to wane? There were several good reasons for this: First and foremost, President Ulysses Grant's administration became mired in a series of incredible scandals. These involved high ranking officials in his administration. Let me give you a couple of examples: The Credit Mobilier

scandal, for example, involved massive corruption in the building of the Transcontinental Railroad. Grant's Vice President was implicated in the cover up of this scandal, and he and most of the people involved were never actually charged. A second big scandal was the Whiskey Ring. This involved a huge illegal effort by distillers, aided by government officials on the take, to avoid paying a new tax on whiskey. Grant's own personal secretary was implicated in this scandal. A third scandal was one involving the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Grant's Secretary of War, named William Belknap, took huge bribes from companies that had licenses to trade on Indian reservations. As you can imagine, any administration beset by scandals often finds itself unable to pursue any kind of initiatives or take care of regular business; and so, as it turned out for the Grant administration, they had much less attention to pay to affairs in the South.

A second big problem in the early 1870s was that the nation's economy was rocked by the Panic of 1873. This was an economic collapse triggered on Wall Street, and it triggered a severe economic depression that lasted five painful years. We're talking the Great Depression of the 19th century: 25 percent unemployment; the failure of thousands of banks and businesses; serious economic hard times. These led to a diminished concern among many Northerners for the plight of freedmen who seemed so far away from them in the American South. Thirdly, many conservatives in the North began to argue that the federal government had done enough for the freedmen. They argued it was now more than five years after the war; it was essentially "sink or swim" time. It was time for the federal government to recall the army; it was time to leave Southerners to sort out their own affairs.

Another factor in prodding the federal government to back off from the South was the role of Southern propaganda. Southerners began a calculated campaign in the early 1870s to convince Northerners that they were living under a reign of terror—what they called "black misrule"—and they played on Northern racism in pursuing this point. They argued that giving voting and office holding rights to African Americans had been a colossal mistake. Blacks, they asserted, were incapable of intelligent leadership. Let's listen now to James S. Pike, who wrote a popular book called *The Prostrate State* in 1874. Listen to his description, which is clearly part of this propaganda effort: "In place of this old aristocratic society stands

the rude form of the most ignorant democracy that mankind ever saw ... It is the dregs of the population [dressed] in the robes of their intelligent predecessors, and asserting over them the rule of ignorance and corruption.” With that kind of language, and with the title of his book *The Prostrate State* suggesting the state was literally on its back, this was very influential stuff, and this propaganda garnered tremendous sympathy for Southerners among Northerners.

Together, these four factors—scandal, depression, conservative frustration, and Southern propaganda—created a political climate where it became very difficult, almost impossible, for Northern politicians to justify a continued commitment to protecting the rights of freedmen in the South. As a result, in the early 1870s organized white resistance—both legal resistance and illegal resistance—to Republican rule began to rise; and when it did, it faced almost no opposition from the federal government. We can see this trend and the larger implications of it in a grisly incident known as the “Colfax Massacre.”

This bloody incident, the Colfax Massacre, originated in a disputed election for governor in the state of Louisiana in 1872. Both the Republican and the Democratic candidates claimed victory, so the decision went to a state election board. That state election board split; it was unable to make a decision. One part of the board said that the Democratic candidate, a man named John McEnery, and a whole slate of Democratic candidates for the state legislature had won the election. But another faction declared the Republican candidate, William P. Kellogg, had won and that a slate of Republican candidates for state legislature were the winners. A very tense standoff ensued. Both candidates for governor held inauguration parties and all the while prepared court challenges and also, given this environment, for the possibility of violence. The dispute was eventually resolved by a Republican federal judge in New Orleans. He ruled that Kellogg and the Republican-majority legislature should be seated; and to make sure that this happened, President Grant sent troops to maintain order and protect the Kellogg government. Here you see another example of Northern power being used to make sure that Republicans aren’t being driven from office. McEnery, the Democratic candidate, however, kept insisting he was the real governor; and, in fact, he went so far as to establish a rival administration in New Orleans—it had no power, but it was certainly to challenge the

legitimacy of the Republican administration—and he backed this rival administration with a paramilitary organization, a Klan-like organization, called the “White League.” The White League as it emerged in this time period was essentially the military wing of the state’s Democratic Party. It vowed very openly to overthrow Republican rule and install McEnery as governor. Tensions mounted in early 1873. Frequent clashes broke out between White Leaguers and the state militia. At one point, to give you a sense of the tumultuous times, McEnery’s armed supporters temporarily seized control of the state house in New Orleans. Federal troops had to come in and drive them out.

Soon, another crisis emerged over another disputed election. This time it was a local election in Grant Parish, the seat of which was a town called Colfax. In this disputed election, the Kellogg administration declared two Republicans had won two local races, one for sheriff and one for judge. But two local Democrats still claimed that they had actually won the election. With their supporters, they took possession of the Colfax Courthouse. Eventually they were ousted by Republicans and their supporters on March 25, 1873; so it’s kind of a back and forth fight between these factions for control of both local government and also, on the larger level, for state government. Local African Americans who were part of this Republican organization were determined to prevent Democrats and their White Leaguer paramilitary organizations from retaking the Colfax Courthouse, so they armed themselves and they surrounded the courthouse vigil-like to sort of protect it. As they expected, very soon a large force of White Leaguers began to march on the courthouse, and they were led by a man named Christopher Columbus Nash.

As you can imagine, a tense standoff ensued. Emotions ran incredibly high. Nobody really knew what the outcome was going to be, but you had two heavily-armed groups squaring off against each other. Eventually, by early April gunshots were exchanged, the first of them on April 2 and then the days that followed. At this point, the local militia commander truly believed that a bloodbath was about to ensue, and so he tried to send a letter to Governor Kellogg, the Republican governor, hoping that he would send in the militia or send in some police somehow to defuse the situation; but it’s intercepted by the people surrounding the courthouse, so it never reached the governor. By this time, Nash’s force of armed whites surrounding the courthouse grew

to several hundred men, and they grew because agitators had sort of fanned out into the countryside and began to spread rumors of black atrocities that were allegedly taking place. It's all fiction, of course, but it was enough to rile up the countryside and get more people to show up in Colfax.

Matters came to a head on Easter Sunday, April 13, 1873. Nash sent out an order to the black men who were defending the courthouse, and he ordered them to disband. They refused, so when they refused he said, "Alright, here's the deal: Women and children, I'm going to give them 30 minutes"—because these men had their families with them—"to clear out from the area of the courthouse because we're going to have a showdown." As soon as the women and children departed, Nash's men began their assault. They quickly overran the courthouse defenders and began killing indiscriminately, and this included killing the wounded and killing those who had decided to surrender. About 50 freedmen fled the area once it was clear that they were going to lose this battle, and they were quickly captured and held as prisoners. Later that evening, though, they were butchered as prisoners by Nash's men. In all, as many as 150 freedmen died in the Colfax Massacre. It was by far the bloodiest incident in Reconstruction.

In the aftermath, Republican officials in New Orleans finally did get word of what was going on and they did indeed send the police and soldiers to restore order, and they eventually arrested a number of perpetrators. Later, the federal government prosecuted these perpetrators and convicted a few of them under the Enforcement Act of 1870. But these men were subsequently freed in the wake of a landmark Supreme Court case that derived directly from the Colfax Massacre; it's known as *United States v. Cruikshank*. In this decision, which was handed down in 1876, the Court ruled that the protections of the 14th Amendment only applied to the actions of state governments and not to the actions of individuals. This meant that the federal government could no longer use the Enforcement Act of 1870 to prosecute crimes by paramilitary groups like the Klan or the White League. As you can see, this decision essentially ended the federal government's ability to protect freedmen and their white allies in the South. As a result, the message of the Colfax Massacre was that the Democratic Party could employ terroristic violence against white and black Republicans with impunity as a means to gain power in the South.

This message soon spread to other states of the former Confederacy. Violence and murder, especially surrounding election days, raged across the South in 1874 and in 1875; hundreds of people were killed. This vigilante violence had two basic goals: First, to strip away the freedmen's hard-won economic, social, and legal rights; and, most concretely, to prevent them from voting and from holding office. This campaign of violence reached full development in Mississippi in 1875 when armed groups of whites allied with the Democratic Party waged a campaign of terror; and this campaign actually took on a name eventually, it was called the "Mississippi Plan," largely because it was barred by so many other states. Through threats, beatings, and killings they delivered an unambiguous message to African Americans and their white allies who dared vote Republican: If they did so, they risked their lives.

Alarmed by these developments, the Republican governor of Mississippi, a man named Adelbert Ames, frantically contacted the Grant administration and pleaded with the administration to send troops to keep the peace, just as they had done earlier in Louisiana and in many other places, and protect the polls. The request, though, was rejected. You can see here that what had normally been an honored request by Republican governors in trouble spots in the postwar South, now the Grant administration was backing off, and in this case they rejected his pretty sorely needed request. Not surprisingly, more than 60,000 Mississippi voters—almost all of them black and Republican—stayed away from the polls on that election day. When 1,500 African Americans dared to try to vote in Aberdeen, Mississippi they were informed by a mob that "if they did not leave town within five minutes ... the last man would be shot dead."

Democrats in that election of 1875 swept to victory in Mississippi. They took complete control of the state legislature for the first time since the Civil War. Immediately they mobilized to remove Governor Ames. They threatened him with impeachment and then ultimately forced him to resign. The effectiveness of this Mississippi Plan is conveyed very vividly in a political cartoon some you may have seen before. It shows an African American man at a polling site being threatened by two white men who actually have two guns pointing at each of his temples, and the caption reads: "Of course he wants to vote the Democratic ticket." The success of this plan in intimidating

black voters and demolishing the base of the Republican Party is indicated also by the words of an African American Republican named George Arnold. He said: "It seems to me that we are drifting, drifting back under the leadership of the slaveholders. Our former masters are [fast] taking the reins of government."

Other Southern states soon employed their own version of the Mississippi Plan. One by one the remaining Reconstruction governments fell to a new class of leaders who called themselves "Redeemers." As the name suggests, these folks depicted themselves or characterized themselves almost in biblical terms: "redeemers," the as "saviors" of Southern society. By 1876, only South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida remained under Republican control, and that's largely because there were still federal troops there. When those federal troops were removed in 1877, it opened the way for a complete redemption of the former Confederacy and a restoration of white rule. At that point, the Counter-Revolution was complete.

Well, actually, it's a bit of an exaggeration to say the Counter-Revolution to undo Reconstruction was completed in 1877; but once the last Republican administrations were removed from power, the final steps to take political power away from African Americans and to confine them to a second-class, segregated world could begin. In the 1880s and 1890s, the creation of the "Jim Crow South" occurred on three fronts; in each case, they undermined one of the three key Amendments passed during Reconstruction. Let's start with the first one: First, the sharecropping system undermined the important achievements of the 13th Amendment. Even though the 13th Amendment ended slavery, the rules of the Jim Crow system that evolved in the 1880s and in the 1890s forced African Americans into a status something very close to slavery. They were stripped of their rights and their freedoms, and therefore were forced into lives of rural poverty under the sharecropping system. They didn't own any land, so they were forced to rent land from whites, in many cases from the former people that had at one point owned them as slaves; and they were forced to cultivate cotton and other cash crops. To rent this land, they paid the owner of the land about a third to one-half of the harvest; that's why it's called "sharecropping." This system left most sharecroppers mired in a never-ending cycle of poverty and debt. How many people did this involve? By 1890, 70 percent of Southern farmers were

sharecroppers. African Americans were not slaves anymore, but they were hardly free either.

Second, segregation undermined the 14th Amendment. Even though the 14th Amendment established African American citizenship and “equality before the law,” the rules of this new Jim Crow system forced African Americans into a decidedly second-class status. Beginning in the 1880s, many private businesses—most notably railroads, ferries, and hotels—adopted policies that either excluded blacks altogether or confined them to segregated facilities. Eventually Southern states and local governments began to adopt these same policies and began to use them for public facilities, like hospitals and schools. While this was happening, African Americans challenged these laws, but conservative courts always ruled in favor of the segregationists. We all know the most famous case involved in this effort: *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. This is the case that validated the so-called “separate but equal” doctrine, and that’s essentially saying that separating races is not unconstitutional so long as they have equal facilities (of course, in reality it turned out that they would be separate facilities but vastly unequal facilities).

Third, restrictions on voting rights undermined the 15th Amendment; for if the 15th Amendment guaranteed African American the rights to vote, the new rules under this Jim Crow system nonetheless successfully disenfranchised African Americans, rendering them politically powerless throughout most of the South. There were three prominent policies involved in this; you’ve probably heard of most of them: the Grandfather Clause, which said that anyone whose grandfather voted before 1867 would be exempt from voting restrictions. Plainly, that meant that almost all African Americans were subject to those restrictions, because how many of them were voting before 1867? The poll tax was the second one. This was an annual tax that you had to pay in order to be eligible to vote. We know that since most African Americans were poor after the war that this means that this is going to almost automatically exclude large numbers of African Americans on the basis of their ability to pay. A third exclusion was the literacy test. This required voters to demonstrate a minimal level of literacy; but, of course, it was selectively imposed, and the evaluations of just how literate a person was were highly subjective. Low levels of education among African Americans meant that the law essentially excluded huge numbers of African

Americans. In practice, often a prospective voter would show up at a polling site and would be given not a basic thing to read but something like a state constitution, some incredibly complicated legal document, and then asked to explain its meaning. The effort was clearly intended to drive many African Americans from the polling site. These disenfranchisement policies reduced black voting in the South by 62 percent. In some states, black voting was nearly eliminated altogether. Take this example of Louisiana: The black vote in Louisiana was reduced in 1896 from 130,000 African Americans to 1,300 voters in 1904. That's a 99 percent reduction in black voting in eight years. This meant, for all intents and purposes, that the Reconstruction Revolution was over; the Counter-Revolution had won.

Clearly, this was a major turning point in American history. The bitter disappointment felt by many African Americans was best captured by the writer and civil rights leader many years later, W. E. B. Dubois, when he wrote a history of Reconstruction. He wrote: "the slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery." Note his phrasing: He said the African Americans moved back again toward slavery, meaning they're not going to go back into slavery but they're going to move back towards slavery; from freedom to something less than free. The good news, if I dare phrase it that way in such a terrible story, is that the Jim Crow system was based on policies that ignored and evaded the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution; but Amendments, as we all know, never go away. Only one on them, Prohibition, has ever been repealed. Even though the cause of African American freedom—and by extension American freedom as a whole—suffered a huge setback in the late 19th century, these key Reconstruction amendments remained part of the Constitution, ready to be reinvigorated and honored in the 1950s and 1960s during the Civil Rights movement.

But that is a topic for another turning point lecture in the future. In our next lecture, we will turn our gaze out West to one of the epic moments in American history: the Battle of Little Big Horn. But for now, that's all.

1876 How the West Was Won and Lost—Custer

Lecture 26

The significance of the Battle of Little Big Horn was not military but rather how it sped the white takeover of the West. The federal government increased funding for the Army and hardened its policy of forcing Indians onto reservations, aided by the anti-Indian sentiment among the American public stoked by the press, politicians, and Western business interests. Meanwhile, with the aid of Buffalo Bill's Wild West and legions of dime novel writers, Custer became an iconic American hero and martyr.

In the spring of 1876, Sioux and Cheyenne Indians began gathering in Montana, led—at least symbolically—by Sitting Bull, chief the Hunkpapa Sioux, in defiance of an edict from Washington DC that they report to reservations. Sitting Bull had experienced a vision of a tremendous Indian victory over the U.S. Army. He hoped this would free them forever from the threat of white settlers and soldiers.

The development of railroads, the acquisition of vast tracts of land in the West, and the Homestead Act turned a trickle of westward pioneers into a torrent after the Civil War. But many of the western lands were already occupied by Native American tribes. Nearly two-thirds of all Native Americans lived on the Great Plains, some in villages but most as nomadic buffalo hunters traversing enormous tracts of land. Increasingly, their hunting grounds were restricted by white settlers, who had superior weaponry, a belief in their own higher claim to the land, and the backing of the U.S. Army.

In 1851, Congress set aside the Oklahoma Territory and most of the central and northern Great Plains reserves for Native Americans. White settlers were explicitly barred from settling there and limited to specific corridors for passing through. But racist attitudes and faith in Manifest Destiny left most white Americans unsympathetic, indeed hostile, to Native Americans' claims to the reservations.

The Plains tribes' dependence on the buffalo left them particularly vulnerable when railroad companies, hunters, and the army began to wipe out the great herds. Meanwhile, the U.S. government broke many of its treaties, as when gold was discovered on a Sioux reservation in the Black Hills of South Dakota. The federal government demanded the Sioux vacate the region. When the tribes refused, the Army summarily declared the region open to white settlement and ordered all Native Americans to move onto reservation lands by January 31, 1876. Hundreds and eventually thousands of Indians left their reservations to join Sitting Bull's resistance near the Little Bighorn River in modern-day Montana.

General George Armstrong Custer led the Seventh Cavalry against this band's Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, including the well-known Crazy Horse on the afternoon of June 25, 1876. Custer's plan suffered from three fatal flaws: He divided his force into three groups, but his sub-commanders failed him miserably; he had woefully inadequate intelligence about the Indians' numbers; and he was so anxious to score a glorious victory that he attacked before the other two columns of troopers arrived.

The Battle of Little Bighorn quickly disintegrated into one of the most devastating defeats ever suffered by the U.S. military. By the end of the day, about 260 cavalrymen lay dead, including Custer. Sitting Bull's vision had been fulfilled, but it quickly proved a hollow victory.

Incensed by the news of Custer's defeat, white Americans demanded the federal government take a tougher line against Native Americans who resisted white expansion into the West. Sitting Bull and his Hunkpapa Sioux took refuge in Canada, but in 1881 they returned to the United States,



Custer's death at Little Bighorn was recast as a martyrdom by proponents of Manifest Destiny.

National Archives and Records Administration.

surrendered, and moved onto a reservation. In 1887, Congress passed the Dawes Act, designed to dissolve tribal lands and encourage the assimilation of Indians into the American mainstream. This led to the rapid loss of Indian reservation lands. By the time the Dawes Act was repealed in 1934, two-thirds of Native American reservation land had been lost.

The Battle of Little Bighorn quickly disintegrated into one of the most devastating defeats ever suffered by the U.S. military.

In the late 1880s, the Ghost Dance revival movement led by a mystic named Wovoka, alarmed federal officials who feared it contained the seeds of rebellion. This was

especially true of the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota, where Sitting Bull lived. On December 15, 1890, fearing that he was about to endorse the Ghost Dance movement, the Seventh Cavalry attempted to arrest Sitting Bull. When a scuffle broke out, Sitting Bull was shot and killed. Then the Army moved to disperse the Ghost Dancers on the reservation who had been gathering near a creek called Wounded Knee. In a matter of minutes the Wounded Knee Massacre resulted in the slaughter of between 200 and 300 Native Americans, many of them women, children, and elderly. Many of the troopers were survivors of Little Bighorn and spoke openly of Wounded Knee as revenge. Custer's great defeat in 1876, it turned out, actually sealed the fate of Sitting Bull and the rest of Native America. ■

Suggested Reading

Donovan, *A Terrible Glory*.

Hine and Faragher. *The American West*.

Philbrick, *The Last Stand*.

Utley, *Sitting Bull*.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you make of Custer? Is he a hero? A martyr? A fool? Or some combination of all three?
2. Which group, white Americans or Native Americans, bears the greatest responsibility for the violence and death that attended much of the story of the West between 1865 and 1900?

1876 How the West Was Won and Lost—Custer

Lecture 26—Transcript

Welcome back. Today, we explore a key turning point in American history from the American West: the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876.

Let's begin with a two-part story: In the spring of 1876, an ever-growing number of Indians, largely Sioux and Cheyenne, began gathering in Montana. They were led, at least symbolically, by one of the great warriors of the age, Sitting Bull, chief of a branch of the Sioux known as the Hunkpapa. It was a very, very tense time, because these Native Americans were defying an edict from Washington, D.C. that they had to report to reservations; and so they knew that it was only a matter of time before the U. S. Army showed up to force a showdown. Sitting Bull was a deeply religious man—he was what the Sioux called a *wicasa wakan*—and he was always looking for signs and omens from the Sioux God, who was known as *Wakan Tanka*, which would guide him in his decisions. In early June, he participated in an annual Sioux religious ritual known as the Sun Dance; and during this ceremony, Sitting Bull went into a deep trancelike state and he saw a vision: Scores of blue-coated soldiers began attacking an Indian village, but as they drew close they began to fall into the village upside down, as Sitting Bull put it, “like grasshoppers.” To Sitting Bull, the vision’s meaning was unmistakable: The Indians he led would soon win a tremendous victory over the troopers of the U.S. Army. Hopefully, he thought, it would be the victory that would free them forever from the threat posed by ever-growing numbers of white settlers and soldiers in the West.

At that very moment, one of the nation’s most famous soldiers, Colonel George Armstrong Custer, was less than 100 miles away from Sitting Bull and this large group of Indians, and he was closing fast. Custer, too, had visions in his head. Although he was famous for his cavalry exploits against the Confederacy in the Civil War and against Native Americans in the West, Custer had recently hit a bit of a rough patch in his career path. Through a series of bad decisions basically, he’d run afoul of President Ulysses Grant and some of the top brass in the U. S. Army. As a result, he’d come to believe that this assignment before him in the spring of 1876—a high-profile campaign against Sitting Bull and the Sioux nation—would provide him

with a golden opportunity for redemption within the Army. Custer, of course, wanted more. He was an extraordinarily ambitious man and he dreamed of achieving a greatness that only a few men had ever known. One last glorious victory in the West and he might very well, he thought, end up in the White House. Just a few weeks later Custer and Sitting Bull would meet in an epic battle, and only one of these two visions would prevail.

Before we plunge into the details of this story, let's establish the objectives for this lecture. Today, we'll focus on four things: First, we'll look at the American West after the Civil War. Then we'll move on to examine the federal government's attempts to force the Sioux onto reservations, which was part of a larger effort to open up the Black Hills in South Dakota to white settlement. Third, we'll look at the famous Battle of Little Bighorn that led to the death of Colonel George Armstrong Custer and more than 250 members of the Seventh Cavalry. Finally, we'll examine the aftermath of this incident and its impact on the fate of Native Americans.

What was happening in the West that brought on this confrontation between the U. S. Army and the Sioux and other Plains Indian tribes like the Cheyenne? We've already touched on some of the key developments in a previous set of lectures that we've done on immigration, on the Transportation Revolution, on the Mexican War and the Gold Rush, and on the Homestead Act. These topics had one thing in common: westward expansion. The development of railroads, the acquisition of huge tracts of land from Mexico, and the handing out of free farms to thousands of settlers turned what was a trickle of westward pioneers into a torrent after the Civil War.

The West loomed as the Promised Land for many Americans, a place of tremendous opportunity and freedom, whether one wanted to engage in farming, mining, ranching, or just entrepreneurship in one of the many western cities like Denver, Portland, or San Francisco that were arising. But there was one problem: Many of the lands of the West were already occupied by Native American tribes; and this was especially true on the Great Plains, where nearly two-thirds of all Native Americans in the West lived. This vast open territory stretched east to west from present-day Missouri to the Rocky Mountains, and north to south from North Dakota down to Texas; so it's a huge piece of territory. Some of the major tribes on the Great Plains included

the Blackfeet, Crow, Arapaho, Pawnee, Kiowa, Cheyenne, and Sioux. Many of these tribes living on the Great Plains lived in settled villages; but the ones that we often associate with the Great Plains—the largest of them and the most powerful of them—were migratory tribes. They had a lifestyle based around on the horse, which actually in their history had arrived only recently via the Spanish in the 18th century; remember, horses are not native to North America. The horse allowed these tribes to follow the seasonal migrations of huge herds of buffalo, and the buffalo provided these Indians basically with everything, from food and clothing to tools and fuel. But reliance on these huge migratory beasts also meant that the tribes such as the Sioux in the north and the Comanche in the Central Plains had to traverse huge tracts of land following the buffalo's annual migrations. This fact increasingly brought them into contact and into conflict with a relentless tide of white settlers who possessed superior weaponry and a belief that they actually had a higher claim to the western land than the Indians. The white settlers also enjoyed the power and support of the federal government and, most importantly, the federal government's army.

For several centuries, it had been the policy of colonial, state, and federal governments to eliminate the so-called "Indian Problem" by just simply forcing tribes from the East into the West. But by 1850, this policy was no longer viable because, simply put, it was simply a matter of the soaring white migration that was moving, as we talked about earlier, into the western territories. By 1851, Congress had to make a decision, and what they did that year was to set aside two huge tracts of land: the Oklahoma Territory and then most of the northern and central Great Plains. They set these aside as lands reserved exclusively for Native Americans. White settlers were explicitly barred from settling there, and if they had to pass through those areas, they were given specific corridors to pass through. Government officials and tribal leaders who struck this deal hoped the treaty would secure a lasting peace in the West, allowing white Americans to flow into the West but also at the same time allowing Native Americans to live in peace on large swaths of territory.

But tension and violence between white settlers and Native American tribes only increased in the coming years. This tension increased between Native Americans and whites for three primary reasons: First, part of the

problem stemmed from a combination of racism and the prevailing faith in Manifest Destiny that left most white Americans unsympathetic—in fact, really hostile—to the idea that Native Americans had any rightful claim to the lands they occupied. Many white Americans believed they possessed a vastly superior culture and therefore they considered Native Americans essentially as obstacles to national progress; obstacles that inevitably must be removed. One writer of a popular book in 1877 wrote, “[T]he Red Men are a doomed race, [for] under what appear to be immutable laws of progress, the savage is giving place to a higher and more civilized race.” That’s a very typical kind of quote; that simply the Native Americans, it’s too bad but they just simply have to go. We can see this very same attitude in a very famous painting by John Gast—you’ve probably seen it before—called “American Progress,” and he painted it in 1872. It shows a beautiful Lady Liberty-like figure hovering over the territories in the middle of the United States heading westward. She carries in one arm a schoolbook, a symbol of civilization, and in the other hand she’s stringing telegraph wire, a symbol of technology and modern life. Underneath her and behind her are a steady stream of railroads, wagon trains, and westward pioneers. If you look all the way to the eastern section of the painting, it’s New York City, the height of civilization; and if you look to the western edge of the painting it’s dark, meaning the light of civilization is moving into the west and bringing civilization and progress with it. If you look on the edge, that dark edge of the painting, you see Native Americans actually fleeing before the advancing whites, and you also see buffalo and other animals fleeing as well. The message is very clear that Native Americans simply have to get out of the way; they’re obstacles to American progress.

A second source of conflict between whites and Native Americans centered on the Plains tribes’ dependence on the buffalo. As we noted earlier, it made them vulnerable, especially in the 1870s when railroad companies, hunters, and the U.S. Army began to systematically wipe out the great herds. The buffalo population in America around 1800 has been estimated as great as 30 million. By the 1880s, it had plunged down to a few thousand; so it’s essentially almost completely eradicated. This created a major crisis for the Plains Indians who completely depended on buffalo for their food, for their tools, and for so much of their life.

A third source of conflict stemmed from the U.S. government's habit of breaking many of the treaties that it signed. The pattern—there was actually a pattern to it—went like this: Federal officials would negotiate a treaty with tribes that promised to permanently fix the boundaries of their hunting grounds and their places of habitation; this was done many times. But almost inevitably, within a short period of time, land-hungry white settlers moving into the West began to settle on these lands that had just been set aside for Native Americans, settling there illegally. But then, rather than enforce the terms of the treaty and remove the white settlers as the treaty obligated them to do, the federal government would inevitably demand of Native Americans a revision of the treaty that would ultimately shrink their designated lands even further. This is precisely what led to the great clash at Little Bighorn in 1876.

This began back in 1868, with the second Fort Laramie Treaty. This treaty had guaranteed to the Sioux ownership of the Black Hills, as well as land and hunting rights in South Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana; and, like these other treaties, it explicitly barred white people from settling in these lands. "From this day forward all war between the parties to this agreement shall forever cease." That's what the treaty declared; you can see the hope and optimism in those words. But unfortunately it proved false. This deal, struck in 1868, lasted only six years because in 1874 gold was discovered in the Black Hills of South Dakota; and this news, as gold discoveries always did, touched off a flood of white fortune seekers flooding into the region, a region that was indisputably—based on this earlier treaty—territory granted exclusively to Native Americans. Rather than keep the white trespassers out, the federal government responded to this situation by demanding that the Sioux vacate the region, move onto reservations, and sell them the Black Hills. When the Native Americans, naturally, refused to sell the Black Hills—this is a particularly sacred place for them—the Army summarily declared the region open to white settlement and ordered that Native Americans report to reservations.

Several Native American tribes—including the Hunkpapa Sioux under Sitting Bull and the Lakota Sioux under Crazy Horse—simply refused to obey this order; and so in the late spring of 1876, the Army began to move into the territory to force them back onto the reservations. But unknown to

the Army, the number of Indians that they were setting out to round up—Sitting Bull and the rest—was growing every day with the arrival of spring weather, because hundreds and eventually thousands of Indians began leaving their reservations to join Sitting Bull. They had no clear plan other than simply to resist the Army and to keep possession of their lands; they were not going to let the Black Hills go without a fight. By the time the Army caught up with them near the Little Bighorn River in modern-day Montana, this encampment of Native Americans had swollen to more than 5,000, and this number included some 1,800 warriors; roughly three times the number of troopers that Custer would bring into the fight.

So now let's turn to the Army's campaign against the Sioux. The Seventh Cavalry, which is going to be at the center of this conflict, was led by a young and vainglorious lieutenant colonel named George Armstrong Custer. Custer had been born in 1839, and he attended West Point; but things did not go so well for him there. He graduated at the bottom of his class—he was always getting into trouble, had a big problem with rules—and it did not look at that moment like he was going to have a promising military career. But the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 provided him with a great opportunity to demonstrate that even though he was not such a great student or cadet, he was actually a very good soldier. As it worked out, within just a few years Custer was widely known as one of the best—if not the best—cavalrymen in the entire Union Army. In fact, General Custer—he was a general at the time—became the youngest man promoted to the rank of General, at age 23. In the course of the Civil War, Custer also developed not only a great talent as a horseman, but also a great talent as a showman; and there was nobody better than Custer for drawing attention to himself. He sported long locks of blonde hair, which he very ostentatiously had flowing down the back of his coat; he wore a custom-made uniform; and, just in case nobody noticed him, a bright red scarf. The press, which is always looking for a good story, took notice of Custer because he was so flamboyant and he was so effective, and by war's end articles about Custer's exploits graced many front pages of the nation's leading newspapers.

After the war, Custer stayed in the Army as its focus shifted from suppressing secession to removing Indians from the path of America's Manifest Destiny. Out west, Custer continued this same dashing style and attention-

grabbing tactics. He donned a custom-made white buckskin uniform and a large-brimmed sombrero-like hat; you probably have seen pictures of him, very distinct. His Native American adversaries noticed this, and they noticed particularly his long, blonde hair; and their nickname for him was “Long Hair.”

Custer, in the years after the civil war out West, had his share of successes; but as we noted in the introduction to this talk, he also had a penchant for running afoul of higher-ups (this is the same problem he had back at West Point). So in 1876, Custer jumped at the opportunity to play a leading role in the large Army offensive against the Sioux, the campaign to force them back onto reservations after they had refused to sell the Black Hills to the government. That operation involved three columns of soldiers who were to converge on the Sioux and their allies from three different directions. The front end of one of these columns was headed by Colonel Custer and the Seventh Cavalry. Custer, hungry for glory (as always), pushed his men hard, and on June 25, 1876, he got there first, way ahead of the other two large columns. He closed in on this large band of Sioux and Cheyenne warriors that were encamped near the Little Bighorn River in Montana. This group, as we’ve noted, included legendary figures like Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull.

Custer had hoped to launch a surprise attack in the early morning hours the next day, which would have been June 26. This was a standard cavalry tactic, to surprise attack, and they always had the advantage because they were attacking full settlements of Indians with women, children, and the elderly; so they could use that to their advantage. But Custer realized pretty quickly on June 25 that his force had been seen by the Indians, so they’d lost the element of surprise. Custer had a decision to make; what to do? His ultimate decision was to “go for it,” to launch an all-out attack that very afternoon, on June 25; he’d lost the element of surprise; the best he could do now was to strike hard.

Custer’s plan was in many ways, at least on paper, a good one; but it suffered from three fatal flaws. The first big flaw in the plan was that he divided his force into three groups. From a military strategy standpoint, this in and of itself is not a mistake, and it did not by definition doom Seventh Cavalry to disaster. The problem came with the men that were in charge of the other two

wings of Custer's force. They failed him miserably during the battle. Major Marcus Reno entered the battle completely drunk on whiskey, and he lost his nerve and allowed his men to become hopelessly bogged down. His other man in charge was Captain Frederick Benteen. He stayed totally sober, but he hated Custer; and so this loathing of Custer essentially convinced him that this was not his fight, so he dragged his feet and never brought his men up in time to support Custer. A second big problem was that Custer had terrible intelligence; he didn't really know the foe that he was about to go up against. He thought he was attacking an Indian encampment of maybe a few hundred warriors—sort of a standard kind of assault—when, in fact, the overall camp was more than 5,000 Indians and the number of warriors was close to 2,000.

A third problem with the campaign was that Custer was so anxious to score a decisive and all-important glorious victory that he hoped would save his career and ultimately launch him right into the White House, with this motivation behind him Custer attacked before the other two large columns of troopers—remember, this was a large operation involving three main forces—arrived, and he probably did so intentionally. He was nervous; he knew that if those other two groups arrived with officers that outranked him that they might actually lead the charge and win all the glory that he thought he deserved. There was another reason why Custer attacked that afternoon, and it was a different sort of reason and it's kind of ironic: Custer believed that he needed to attack right then and there because he feared that if he delayed, not only would these other officers show up, but that the Indians might flee and get away and deny him his glory. As it turned out, the last thing this massive gathering of Indians—one of the largest ever recorded—had in mind was ever dispersing. They were there to fight, and fight to save the Black Hills. These Native Americans had also heard of Sitting Bull's vision of a smashing victory against the blue coats, and they were eager for battle.

The Battle of Little Bighorn quickly disintegrated into one of the most devastating defeats ever suffered by the U. S. military. It started with Major Reno. Major Reno was ordered to lead the first offensive thrust. He had three companies under his command and he led them north and almost immediately engaged a large group of Indian warriors; but Reno's drinking and the unexpectedly large number of Indians caused him to stop his charge

and then to set up a skirmishing line. This only allowed for more Indians to join the fight, and soon Reno's force was in a headlong retreat with Reno rather disgracefully leading the pack. They suffered terrible losses before they eventually managed to get across a river and take refuge on a high bluff. Although Reno's orders were clearly to move north and meet up with Custer, the battle—and the booze—took all the fight out of him. Some time later, Reno was joined by the second piece of Custer's intended three-pronged attack, Captain Benteen and the three companies under his command. Benteen had most of the Seventh's ammunition, and he also knew that he was to meet up with Custer to the north for the climactic battle. But, as we noted earlier, Benteen hated Custer, and he was in no mood to move quickly. Even when he heard eventually fighting to the north and gunshots—fighting that he knew must be Custer and his men engaging the Indians—he dawdled. Even later, when he got an actual note, hastily scrawled from Custer, urging him to come forward quickly and to bring ammunition, Benteen took his time. That left Custer and his men—about 210 men in total—out in front and all alone to face many more times their number of hostile Indian warriors.

With no survivors from Custer's force, we have only fragments of evidence that suggest what exactly happened to Custer and his men; but we do know this: Unsupported by Reno and Benteen and running low on ammunition, Custer and his men were gradually surrounded and annihilated by a huge force of Sioux and Cheyenne warriors. In total, more than 250 members of the Seventh Cavalry lay dead by day's end. Among them were Custer, two of his brothers, a brother-in-law, and a nephew. Sitting Bull's vision of endless blue-coated soldiers falling headlong into a Sioux village had been fulfilled.

Now let's take a look at the aftermath. Although the Battle of Little Bighorn was an overwhelming triumph for the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors that day, it quickly proved to be a hollow victory; and here is where we see why this event qualifies as a turning point in American history, because it marked the beginning of the end of Native American military resistance. It also marked the beginning of the end of their independent way of life. By the 1890s, nearly all Native Americans would be confined to government-run reservations.

How did this happen? Americans in the East were incensed by the news of Custer's defeat, and white Americans in the East demanded that the federal government take a tougher line against Native Americans who resisted white expansion into the West. Responding to this pressure, the United States government expanded military action in the Black Hills, and eventually forced most of the Sioux and other defiant tribes onto reservations. Further out west, in a story that was captured in the newspapers and really captivated the country, a faction of a tribe called the Nez Perce tribe that lived in what were parts of Idaho, Oregon, and Washington resisted the government's attempt to force them onto reservations. Led by Chief Joseph, they fled the region, hoping, trying to get to the border at Canada where they could cross into safety. They came within 40 miles of the Canadian border before they were apprehended by the Army and then forced to return to life on a reservation. Sitting Bull and his Hunkpapa Sioux actually did take refuge in Canada after Little Bighorn, but in 1881, just five years later, they returned to the United States and surrendered, and moved onto a reservation. Five years later, in another well-publicized story of Native American resistance coming to an end, Geronimo, the great Apache leader in the American southwest, surrendered and moved onto a reservation. One year after that, in 1887, Congress passed what they called the Dawes Act. This was a program designed to dissolve tribal lands and encourage the assimilation of Indians into the American mainstream. At the time, it was well-intended, but it led to the rapid loss of Indian reservation lands; and by the time the Dawes Act had run out—by the time it was repealed in 1934—two-thirds of Native American land had been lost.

As these events were transpiring, there emerged on the Great Plains in the late 1880s one last burst of resistance. It was a remarkable revival called the "Ghost Dance movement." It was a spiritual revival, and it was based on the ecstatic ritual called the "Ghost Dance." The chief promoter of this movement was a mystic named Wovoka, who preached that if Native Americans would participate in the Ghost Dance and rededicate themselves to Native ways, their God would hear them and would eliminate their white oppressors and would bring back the buffalo. This hopeful message of the Ghost Dance spread rapidly among Native Americans from the Rocky Mountains to the Great Plains; and, of course, it alarmed federal officials, because they feared—quite understandably—that it contained the seeds of

rebellion; and they were especially concerned about its popularity among the Sioux and tried to ban it.

Concern over the Ghost Dance ran especially high on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, where Sitting Bull lived. On December 15, 1890, fearing that Sitting Bull was about to endorse the Ghost Dance movement, which would only spread its popularity, the Army moved in to arrest him. A scuffle broke out, and Sitting Bull was shot and killed. A few days later, the Army moved to disperse the Ghost Dancers on the reservation who had been gathering in growing numbers near a creek called Wounded Knee. After a few days of tense standoff, the Army decided to move in and disarm the Ghost Dancers. In the ensuing scuffle, shots were fired; who fired the first shots, we'll never know, but we do know that the Army then responded with indiscriminate shooting of any and all Indians they could find. In a few minutes, the Wounded Knee Massacre resulted in the slaughter of between 200 and 300 Native Americans, many of them women, children, and elderly. The Army quickly buried them in a mass grave.

What Army unit was responsible for this massacre? It was the Seventh Cavalry, Custer's old regiment that 14 years earlier had been devastated at Little Bighorn. Many of the troopers present at the Wounded Knee Massacre were survivors of that very debacle, and they spoke openly of Wounded Knee as revenge for Little Bighorn.

The Wounded Knee Massacre was not the bloodiest clash between Native Americans and the U. S. Army, but it came to symbolize the brutality associated with the conquest of the West. The great Indian victory over Custer in 1876, as it turned out, actually sealed the fate of Sitting Bull and the rest of Native America. It also played a major role in a different but related development in the history of the American West. In the aftermath of Little Big Horn, the American public was divided over the legacy of Custer; was he a fool, or was he a hero? Just five years after the battle, a man named William Cody, a former scout, hunter, and guide, began staging Wild West exhibitions. The audience came to know him as Buffalo Bill, and he soon became one of the most famous showmen in all of American history.

Millions came to see Buffalo Bill's troupe of hundreds of real cowboys and real Indians, reenacting mythical scenes from the American West. One of his most popular and most influential shows was the reenactment of Custer's last stand. It effectively ended the debate about Custer and turned him into an American icon and hero. It also represented a particular way of understanding the story of the American West. Buffalo Bill fashioned and popularized a heroic narrative of the West as a story of pioneers and cowboys and cavalymen. It left out, to a large degree, the messy and uncomfortable details about Native Americans and their claims to the land. This version of the West would become a central part of American culture and identity, reinforced in coming decades by radio, television, movies, songs, and books. Always one of the most popular stories was Custer's last stand.

For all these reasons, the Battle of Little Big Horn was indeed a major turning point in American history. In our next lecture, we'll move from the wide open stretches of the Great Plains to the smoky, crowded cities in the East to look at the Haymarket Bombing of 1886.

1886 The First Red Scare—Haymarket

Lecture 27

Industrialization sometimes led to political corruption and the ruthless exploitation of workers. Workers joined the labor movement to protect themselves from wage cuts, long hours, and unsafe conditions. Some Americans denounced unions as socialist and un-American; others either supported unions or remained indifferent. This changed dramatically with the Haymarket Riot, which launched America's first Red Scare and stymied efforts to create a national labor party like those in every other industrialized society.

On September 5, 1882, in New York City, America's first Labor Day parade began a procession of about 400 men plus a brass band. By 1886, Labor Day had become a national event, and in 1894, President Grover Cleveland signed the holiday into law for all federal workers. The power and unity of organized labor were growing.

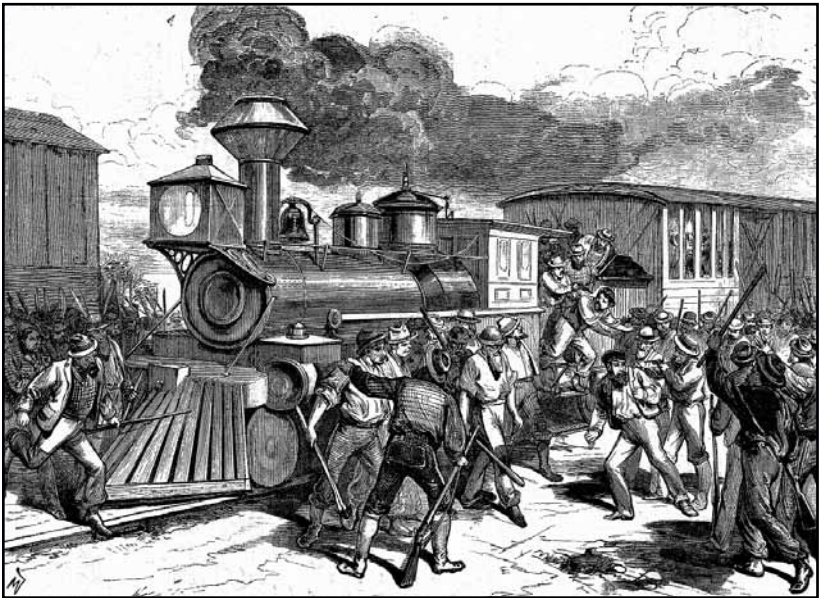
The Gilded Age (1870–1900) was one of the most tumultuous periods in American history, rocked by strikes and class conflict. American workers by and large supported the broad ideals of a free market economy, but they also believed that monopolists, in league with unscrupulous politicians, had seized control of the free market economy and twisted it toward their own advantage. Upward mobility seemed less and less attainable—a disaster for the whole republic.

Three special Congressional committees (in 1879, 1883, and 1898) investigated “the relations between labor and capital” and found hard evidence of longer hours, lower wages, and increasing hostility from employers toward workers. Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* (1879) argued industrialization brought both greater progress for a few and increased poverty for many.

Conservatives argued that the greatest danger to the American republic was not the widening gap between the rich and the poor but the possibility that the poor would rise up in bloody rebellion against the wealthy and seize what did

not belong to them. Their fears seemed justified in July 1877 when a railroad strike, called the Great Uprising, led to 100 deaths and mass destruction of railroad property. Business leaders, editors, clergy, and elected officials denounced the forces of radicalism, anarchy, revolution, and violence they believed responsible. Members of the middle and upper classes demonized the poor and demanded that working-class protests be crushed.

The most important labor organization to emerge in the 1880s was the Knights of Labor (KOL). Founded in 1869 by Philadelphia garment cutters, it decried “the aggression of aggregated wealth” and called for all workers to unite to secure “a proper share of the wealth that they create.” It preached the unity of all workers under the slogan “An injury to one is an injury to all.” The KOL welcomed skilled and unskilled, immigrant and native-born, white and black, and male and female workers. Its practical goals were an eight-hour workday, abolition of prison and child labor, and equal pay for men and women. By 1886 it was the world’s largest industrial union.



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The Great Uprising (1877) stoked middle- and upper-class fear of a worker's rebellion, leading to further oppression, rather than assistance, for the poor.

Small but vocal groups of socialists and anarchists ratcheted up the anxiety over radicalism. The two main centers of anarchist activity in the United States were New York and Chicago.

American labor organizations called a general strike for the eight-hour day on May 1, 1886. An estimated 340,000 went on strike, and crowds marched in New York City, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Chicago, all peacefully.

Newspapers across the country decried the riot as evidence of a vast and dangerous radical conspiracy. America's first Red Scare was on.

But on May 3, violence broke out in Chicago when police attacked a group of workers picketing outside a factory. Their leaders, including some anarchists, called a mass meeting for the next night.

On May 4, 1886, about 3,000 workers gathered in Chicago's Haymarket Square to hear speeches. Gathered nearby were almost 300 Chicago

policemen. Mayor Carter Harrison visited the rally, concluded that the crowd was peaceful, and told the police captain to disperse his men. The captain disobeyed and tried to disperse the crowd. Moments later, an explosion rocked the square, killing one patrolman and wounding several dozen more. Police began firing indiscriminately and clubbing anyone within reach. At least two and as many as six civilians died, along with seven police.

Newspapers across the country decried the riot as evidence of a vast and dangerous radical conspiracy. America's first Red Scare was on. Police arrested hundreds of suspects. Eight anarchists stood trial—six of them foreign born. The presiding judge was openly hostile to the defendants, and many of the jurors admitted they were prejudiced against the defendants, including one relative of one of the dead policemen. The prosecution admitted that it had no evidence but argued that the men should be found guilty for spreading their dangerous ideas. They were found guilty, and all but one were sentenced to death. Four were hanged, one committed suicide, and the rest were pardoned by a later Illinois governor, who destroyed his own career to correct the gross miscarriage of justice.

The long-term impact of the Haymarket bombing was the failure of socialism in America. Most other industrialized nations have a labor party; in the United States, the more conservative American Federation of Labor became the largest union and focused on higher wages, shorter hours, and job security. They also excluded unskilled workers and, for a time, women, African Americans, and recent immigrants. Haymarket sparked the establishment of May Day as the international day of the worker—everywhere except in America, the nation that inspired it. ■

Suggested Reading

Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy*.

Green, *Death in the Haymarket*.

McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*.

Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*.

Questions to Consider

1. What did most American workers want in the Gilded Age? What were they upset about?
2. Why have Americans long feared and opposed socialism, anarchism, and other forms of radicalism?

1886 The First Red Scare—Haymarket

Lecture 27—Transcript

Hello; welcome back. Once again, it's time to explore a key turning point in American history. Today, we look at the Haymarket bombing of 1886. Let's start off with a story.

On Tuesday, September 5, 1882, an impressive parade of about 10,000 men, plus a few brass bands, headed up Broadway in New York City. The marchers in this parade held aloft signs that read, “To the Workers Should Belong All Wealth”; “All Men Are Created Equal”; “Labor Built This Republic, Labor Shall Rule It”; “Strike with the Ballot”; “Labor Pays All Taxes”; “Eight Hours for a Legal Days’ Work.” In case you hadn’t guessed it, this was the original Labor Day holiday and parade. It quickly gained popularity in cities across the United States, and by 1886 it had become a national event. In 1894, President Grover Cleveland signed into law a measure establishing Labor Day as a holiday for all federal workers. What did the establishment of Labor Day in the 1880s signify? On the one hand, it indicated the growing power and unity of organized labor in this period. On the other hand, the fact that some people felt compelled to create a day to draw attention to the importance of American workers and their struggles suggests a very troubled state of affairs; and, in fact, the period here we’re talking about—the period known as the Gilded Age, roughly from 1870–1900—was one of the most tumultuous in American history; it was a period rocked by strikes and growing evidence of class conflict. The one event above all that reflected all these troubling trends was the Haymarket bombing of 1886.

Before we go any further into the story of the Haymarket bombing, let's set out our objectives for this lecture; we'll focus on four main things: First, we'll look at the state of Gilded Age America in the 1880s to see what conditions led to the Haymarket bombing. Second, we'll examine how the American labor movement emerged in this period to challenge some of the darker aspects of the Industrial Revolution. Then, we'll examine the Haymarket bombing itself. Then finally, we'll examine the larger, long-term impact of the Haymarket bombing of 1886.

OK, let's start by looking at the state of Gilded Age America, especially in the 1880s, to see what conditions led to the Haymarket bombing. As we noted in the introduction to this lecture, the period from about 1870–1900 was known as the “Gilded Age,” and this name reflected the dual nature of the era. To some, it was an age of gold, an age of extraordinary economic expansion, wealth creation, and technological breakthroughs—things like the transcontinental railroad, electricity, the telephone, the phonograph—but to others, the period was one of poverty, exploitation, and turmoil. It was, like anything that's gilded, in their minds just coated superficially with a thin layer of gold. This latter, more pessimistic view of the Industrial Revolution was the one most often expressed by the growing ranks of industrial workers. Through the pages of labor newspapers, in speeches at worker rallies, and in actions like strikes, workers articulated a sharp critique of this new industrial order. A very small percentage of these workers were socialists and anarchists, but most workers in this period supported the broad ideals of a free market economy; in fact, their rising anger reflected their belief that greedy monopolists, in league with unscrupulous politicians, had seized control of the free market economy and twisted it to their own advantage. As a result, argued workers, they received a shrinking portion of the wealth they created while working longer hours in increasingly inhumane conditions. Try as they might, these workers claimed, the great American faith in upward mobility—the kind celebrated by the rags-to-riches life story of steel magnate Andrew Carnegie—seemed less and less attainable. This trend, they argued, was not merely unfortunate for those people who were left behind; it meant the American republic itself was in danger of disintegration. In 1882, for example, a labor organization issued a declaration that really got to the heart of this idea; let's listen to what they said. Again, this is workers in 1882 kind of issuing a manifesto identifying the problem:

When the producers of the wealth of a nation live in poverty while idlers roll in luxury and dissipation then the economic system which causes such unnatural conditions must be wrong. Men who are bound to follow the dictates of factory lords, that they may earn a livelihood, are not free. It is therefore evident that as the power of combined and centralized capital increases, the political liberties of the toiling masses become more and more illusory.

Workers weren't the only ones who were troubled by these trends associated with rapid industrialization; social reformers also came forward to voice their concerns, and one of the most influential in this period was a guy named Henry George. In 1879, he published a bestselling book entitled *Progress and Poverty*, and the book's title captured perfectly this vexing duality in the late 19th century: that on the one hand industrialization brought great progress for many people, but also increased poverty for even more people. Henry George put it this way: "It is though an immense wedge were being forced, not underneath society"—which, of course, would lift everybody up—"but through society. Those who are above the point of separation are elevated, but those who are below are crushed down"; so this idea of the wedge, a very powerful metaphor. George, like the workers, said if we don't fix this, the republic is in great danger. But this rising course of concern over the direction of industrialization and the threat that it posed to republicanism and democracy was rejected by a powerful conservative response that offered a very different interpretation of both increased social turmoil and poverty; and here we can see another good example of a theme we've talked about in our lectures, about how history is often about conflict, not just of violent conflict, but conflict of ideas. Who were these people and what did they say?

In the mid-1870s, middle and upper class Americans celebrated laissez-faire individualism as never before; and according to this view, the greatest danger to the American republic was not the widening gap between the rich and poor, but rather the possibility that the poor would rise up in bloody rebellion against the wealthy and successful and seize what did not belong to them. The image in the mind of these folks is the Paris Commune; this occurred back earlier in the decade, between March and May of 1871, when radicals in Paris seized control of the Parisian government. Twenty thousand people died in the violence that ensued during this Paris Commune. Conservatives in America feared an American version of the Paris Commune seemed to be right around the corner, and in July, 1877, it seemed to become a reality. That's when railroad workers from Maryland to the Midwest staged the biggest strike in the world in the 19th century, and it was called the "Great Uprising." The Great Uprising was not just huge, it was also incredibly violent. In Pittsburgh, soldiers opened fire on striking workers and their families, killing 20 and wounding 29. Enraged by these killings, strikers and their supporters attacked the troops and the Pennsylvania Railroad's

stockyards, resulting in the destruction of all the terminal's buildings and over 100 locomotives and 2,000 cars. In the end, federal troops and state militias were brought in throughout the country and at least 100 people were killed, few of them actual rioters, many of them just simply innocent bystanders.

This incident, the Great Uprising, elicited searing condemnations from business leaders, editors, clergy, and elected officials across the country. For years they'd been haunted by the fear that rising social unrest among the nation's "dangerous classes"—as they liked to call them—could at any moment explode in bloody revolution. Now their worst fears seemed realized. They denounced the forces of radicalism, anarchy, revolution, and violence that they believed were responsible for the uprising; and in particular, they denounced these radicalisms as foreign, dangerous ideas spread in America by European socialists and anarchists. As a consequence, members of the middle and upper classes in the late 1870s and into the 1880s demonized the poor as unfit, grasping losers; and they also demanded that working class protests be crushed, violently if necessary, by the power of the state. I'll give you just one example, which was very common in this period. A religious weekly said at one point: "Napoleon was right when he said the best way to deal with a mob is to exterminate it." You get the idea: Gilded Age America was a conflicted place. There was tremendous excitement about progress associated with industrialization, but Gilded Age America was also polarized over the question of rising poverty and shrinking opportunity.

With that in mind, let's turn to examine how the American labor movement emerged in this period to challenge some of these darker aspects of the Industrial Revolution. The most important labor organization to emerge in the 1880s was the Knights of Labor. It had actually been founded way back in 1869 by a small group of garment cutters in Philadelphia. For its early years, it remained quite small, until the late 1870s when it began to take off, attracting tens of thousands of new members. What made the Knights of Labor so popular in this period? Several things: First, the Knights of Labor offered a sharp critique of laissez-faire capitalism, arguing that it threatened the future of the American republic; so you can see they're right in line with this rhetoric we've been talking about. Its constitution, for example, decried "the aggression of aggregated wealth"; and in this case they were

talking about industrialists, bankers, and stock speculators. They warned that this would soon lead “to the pauperization and hopeless degradation of the toiling masses.” The Knights of Labor also called for workers to unite and to secure “a proper share of the wealth that they create.”

The second source of their popularity was that the Knights of Labor preached a unity of all workers under the slogan “An Injury to One is an Injury to All”; and in practical terms, this meant that the Knights of Labor welcomed both skilled and unskilled workers; it also welcomed immigrant workers and native-born workers; and remarkably, the Knights of Labor also welcomed women and African Americans. As a result, in an era when most labor unions were almost exclusively the domain of native-born white men, the Knights of Labor garnered a membership that by 1886 was 10 percent female and 10 percent African American.

A third source of their popularity was that the Knights of Labor worked to achieve a series of very practical goals that had wide appeal among workers: First and foremost, the eight-hour workday; also the abolition of prison labor; the abolition of child labor; and the establishment of equal pay for men and for women. The fourth source of their popularity was that they also were great at leading strikes. Most strikes in this period were small and local, but on several occasions the Knights of Labor enjoyed success on a grand scale. Just to give you one example: In 1885, they led railroad workers who were affiliated with the Knights of Labor on a strike against the Wabash Railroad, and this was owned by financier Jay Gould, a man widely despised and feared by workers; he’s one of the arch-villains in their minds. A victory over him brought tremendous enthusiasm and new members to the union. The Knights of Labor was also behind the establishment of Labor Day and its establishment around the country, what we talked about at the beginning of this lecture. For all these reasons, the Knights of Labor enjoyed tremendous popularity and their membership soared from 10,000 in 1879 to 42,000 in 1882 to over 700,000 in late 1886, making it by far the world’s largest industrial union. As the Knights of Labor grew larger in membership and influence in the 1880s, it alarmed employers, politicians, and conservatives. They feared its radical rhetoric and its demands for economic reform, and they denounced the Knights of Labor leaders as radical socialists who were, in their minds, bent on promoting violence and class warfare. Neither of these

accusations was true, but they caused many middle class and many upper class Americans to fear organized labor; and we can see this in the many political cartoons of the period. There's one that stands out in my mind; the caption is "It Works Both Ways," and it shows a worker with a club raised over his shoulder about to bludgeon an employer into submission. This was in a popular magazine; so demonizing labor as really sort of out of control and prone to violence.

One of the things that ratcheted up this anxiety over worker radicalism was the emergence of a very small but highly vocal group of socialists and anarchists. Socialists called for the government to take control of private property, including railroads and factories, in the name of the people. Anarchists called for the abolition of both the government and private property and the establishment of a society based on small, autonomous collectives. Of the two, anarchists were deemed the most dangerous—they were the most feared—because many anarchists argued that their goals could only be achieved through violent revolution. The two great centers of anarchist activity in America at this time were in New York and in Chicago.

What happened next? As the labor movement gained strength, it inspired several labor organizations to set May 1, 1886 as a day for a nationwide one-day general strike to win the eight-hour day. For many workers, the eight-hour day symbolized their struggle for justice in this new economic order. The slogan most associated with the movement was "Eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep, eight hours for what we will." When May 1, 1886 arrived, the eight-hour general strike achieved some modest but still pretty impressive results. An estimated 340,000 workers went out on strike that day; that's nationwide. Crowds of 10,000 workers marched in New York City, Detroit, and Milwaukee; but the biggest turnout was in Chicago, where about 40,000 workers went on strike for the eight-hour day and another 40,000 workers joined them in a huge parade to show support. Many commentators and politicians feared violence and expected violence, but the day actually was quite peaceful.

But two days later, violence did break out when a large contingent of Chicago police attacked a group of workers picketing outside of a factory, and as the strikers fled the police opened fire, and it killed two workers and

wounded dozens more. This incident outraged city workers and in response, some of their more radical leaders—especially a small but influential group of anarchists—called a mass meeting for the next night to protest the police violence. To generate a large crowd, they printed up thousands of fliers, both in English and in German, and spread them throughout the city. The next evening, on May 4, 1886, about 3,000 workers gathered under a light mist in Chicago’s Haymarket Square to hear a series of speeches—angry speeches—denouncing what had just happened. A well-known anarchist named August Spies spoke first, and he set the tone for the evening by denouncing the police violence and urging the crowd to unify and to work harder to achieve the eight-hour day and other reforms. More speakers followed, including his friend and fellow anarchist Albert Parsons. Gathered nearby were about 300 Chicago policemen, and they were under the command of Inspector John Bonfield, a policeman who had earned a notorious reputation for using violence against labor gatherings in the previous few years. At one point, the city’s mayor, Carter Harrison, arrived at the rally. He stayed for a little while, but he concluded that the crowd was peaceful and just venting their anger and that violence seemed very unlikely; and so he said this to Captain Bonfield, and said he should send most of the policemen away, and then he went home.

It was sometime after 10 p.m. when the last speaker, Samuel Fielden, was finishing up his remarks. Bonfield at this point decided that he’d heard enough—particularly since the policemen were taking the brunt of the criticism—and he sent in the police to disperse the crowd. Moments later, a violent explosion rocked the square. A powerful bomb had gone off amid the ranks of the policemen, killing one patrolman named Mathias Degan and wounding several dozen more. At that moment, all hell broke loose. The police began firing their guns indiscriminately and clubbing anyone within reach and it’s likely, given recent events in Chicago, that a few workers in the crowd may, in fact, also have fired some revolvers; we don’t know. The panic-stricken crowd fled in every direction. Many people had been shot; at least two and as many as six of the workers died from their wounds (there were conflicting reports). As for the police, seven men lay dead or dying. Most of them, it was later revealed, probably died from friendly fire; they were victims of their own fellow officers’ panic after the bomb went off.

The incident touched off a frenzy of fear and panic. Newspapers across the country played a central role in this, describing the violence in Chicago not as a single act of violence perpetrated by an unknown assailant, but rather as definitive evidence of a vast and dangerous radical conspiracy to destroy the American republic. The Chicago newspapers led the way. The *Chicago Times*, for example, described the perpetrators as “arch-counselors of riot, pillage, incendiarism, and murder,” and the paper went on to call for a no-holds-barred repression of the city’s radicals: “Let us whip these Slavic wolves back to the European dens from which they issued, or in some way exterminate them.” The headline of the *New York Times* screamed, “Anarchy’s Red Hand: Rioting and Bloodshed in the Streets of Chicago”; and the opening line of the article that fell beneath that headline said, “The villainous teaching of the anarchists bore bloody fruit in Chicago tonight, and before daylight at least a dozen stalwart men will have laid down their lives as a tribute to the doctrine of anarchism.” America’s first “Red Scare” was on.

To give you a sense of the fear generated by the Haymarket bombing, let’s listen to a prominent minister argue that America needed to sharply curtail free speech because anarchists were taking advantage of it: “We need a careful definition of what freedom is. If it means the license to proclaim the gospel of disorder, to preach destruction and scatter the seeds of anarchy, the sooner we exchange the republic for an iron-handed monarchy the better it will be for all of us.” He’s even suggesting monarchy replace republican government.

Within days, the police had arrested hundreds of suspects; but in the end only eight—and all of them were anarchists—were selected to stand trial. Their names were Albert Parsons, August Spies, Oscar Neebe, Louis Lingg, George Engel, Adolph Fischer, Michael Schwab, and Samuel Fielden. Of the men, six were foreign-born—five born in Germany, one in England—and Parsons and Neebe were the American-born ones. The trial garnered front-page coverage across the country; indeed, it became an international spectacle. It began on July 16, 1886, and lasted until August 11. The presiding judge, a man named Joseph E. Gary, made it clear early on that he was openly hostile to the defendants. The jury was made up mainly of businessmen or men drawn from the middle class professions. Many were

permitted on the jury even though they admitted that they were prejudiced against the defendants, including one juror who was a relative of one of the killed policemen. The prosecution admitted that it had no evidence linking the men to the bombing; there was no eyewitness who came forward to say they saw any of the eight men throw the bomb. Instead, the prosecution argued that the men, all admitted anarchists, should be found guilty for spreading their dangerous ideas and inciting others to violence. Let's listen to what the prosecuting attorney said in his closing remarks to the jury:

Law is on trial. Anarchy is on trial. These men have been selected, picked out by the grand jury and indicted because they were leaders. They are no more guilty than the thousand who follow them. ... [C]onvict these men, make examples of them, hang them and save our institutions, our society.

The jury returned a verdict of guilty after deliberating less than three hours. A month later, Judge Gary issued the sentences: One man, Oscar Neebe, received a sentence of 15 years; the other seven were sentenced to death by hanging. The defense attorneys appealed immediately to the Illinois Supreme Court, and that was rejected. They also then appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court; that was also rejected. One of the men, Louis Lingg, avoided the gallows by committing suicide in his cell. Two others had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment at the last moment by the Governor of Illinois, Richard Oglesby. But on November 11, 1887, Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel, and Adolph Fischer were paraded to the gallows in the Cook County Jail wearing white robes and summarily hanged. Just before they died, August Spies shouted, "The time will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today." Two days later, workers in Chicago staged a mass funeral procession for Lingg, Parsons, Spies, Engel, and Fischer through the streets of Chicago; it drew a crowd of several hundred thousand people. Six years later, in 1893, a new governor—John Peter Altgeld, a man more sympathetic to labor—pardoned the three remaining Haymarket defendants (Fielden, Schwab, and Neebe), and he did so knowing that it would destroy his political career given the public's hostility towards organized labor in general and the Haymarket defendants in particular. In his statement explaining the pardons, Altgeld

pulled no punches and instead laid out in ample detail the evidence to show that the trials were a gross miscarriage of justice.

Now it's time to address the key question: What was the larger, long-term impact of the Haymarket bombing of 1886? There are a number of them; let's look at first and foremost: The most significant impact of the Haymarket bombing was that it sent America in a very different direction from its fellow industrializing nations. Among historians, this is known as the "Why is there no socialism in America?" question. It's one of the biggies; it's right up there with "Why did America become a slaveholding society?" Think about this: In every other industrialized nation—England, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, you name it—a socialist, labor, or communist party developed into a major political force in the early 20th century; but in the United States, no such leftist political tradition emerged. There seemed to be one in the works, in the making, right after Haymarket. In the fall of 1886, workers in 200 cities and towns across the nation formed labor parties and ran candidates for offices, ranging from city councilor to governor. Most candidates lacked money and experience, but there were some notable surprises in the outcomes. For example, in Chicago, their United Labor Party pulled 25,000 votes out of about 92,000 cast, and they managed to elect a state senator and seven state assemblymen. In Milwaukee, the People's Party elected a mayor, a state senator, six state assemblymen, and one congressman. In one of the most widely-watched contests, Henry George—remember he's the one who wrote the book *Progress and Poverty* that we mentioned earlier in this lecture—ran also in something called the United Labor party and he finished a close second in the mayor's race for New York, even outpolling Teddy Roosevelt; Teddy Roosevelt finished a distant third in that election.

These Labor Party efforts soon fizzled. In the 1890s, the People's Party, a product of the populist movement, seemed poised to establish a powerful third party focused on the needs of farmers and workers; but it, too, also faded. In the early 20th century, the Socialist Party gained considerable support; but its biggest moment of all came in 1912 when the Socialist Party candidate for president, Eugene Debs, pulled nearly one million votes, but nothing ever came of that. In short, no Labor Party emerged in industrial America. What explains this difference about American history?

Historians and political scientists have offered a number of explanations for this difference, including the fact that America never had an aristocracy or a nobility; so maybe that meant American workers were less class-conscious because they didn't have an enemy to take down. There's another explanation that said capitalist values are so strong in America, particularly the value of private property; maybe that diminished class consciousness and undermined any Labor Party effort. There's also the factor that some people offer of the success of capitalism. Capitalism created a huge middle class that tend not to favor socialism, anarchism, and all the other radical ideologies.

But there's a strong case to be made that this turn stemmed from the fallout from the Haymarket bombing of 1886. For one, it created such an intense and lasting climate of fear and hostility, it provided justification for public officials across the nation to crack down on the labor movement; not just anarchists and socialists, but the mainstream labor movement. This effort sped the demise of the Knights of Labor and the rise of a more conservative American Federation of Labor, the AFL. The AFL took a very different approach to the problems facing workers. It rejected the radicalism of the Knights of Labor and instead focused on what it termed "pure and simple goals": higher wages, shorter hours, job security. The AFL also rejected the idea of organizing unskilled workers; they argued that these workers were too weak and too unreliable. They also excluded women, African Americans, and to a large extent recently-arrived immigrants. Most significantly, at least in terms of the question we are seeking to answer here, the AFL explicitly rejected independent political action; and the AFL would dominate the labor scene well into the 1930s, by which time America had undergone a second Red Scare, something we'll talk about in an upcoming lecture. By that point, it was clear there would never be a Labor Party in America; at least not in anybody's lifetime. I'll leave it to you to decide whether this is a positive turn of events or not; my only point is to suggest that it was significant.

A second impact of the Haymarket bombing is that it sparked the establishment of May Day as the international day of the worker; and this is one of the most interesting, and ultimately ironic, aspects of this story. Have you ever wondered why America celebrates Labor Day in early September while the rest of the industrialized world celebrates a similar holiday on May 1? We know from the introduction of this lecture why Labor Day in the U.S.

occurs in early September; it's a somewhat arbitrary or even random choice. But the rest of the world, why May 1? The answer is that labor activists in Europe in 1889 chose May 1 in honor of the earlier American effort to establish the eight-hour day and to honor what they believed were the martyrs of the Haymarket incident. On May 1, 1890, large demonstrations were held in the United States, Europe, and Latin America to demand the eight-hour day. The next year it spread to more nations, and within a few years May 1, May Day, was firmly established as the international day of the worker everywhere; that is, except America, the nation that actually inspired the honoring of May 1.

Finally, let's turn to the strange story of the policemen's statue. On May 30, 1889, a nine-foot tall bronze statue of a Chicago policeman was unveiled in the middle of Haymarket Square; and it stood there without incident until 1927 when a streetcar crashed into it, allegedly because the motorman objected to its authoritarian message. The statue was repaired, and then moved to Union Park in Chicago. In the 1950s, it was moved back to a spot near Haymarket, and then things really got interesting. On May 4, 1968—this was the 82nd anniversary of the bombing—vandals spray painted the statue black; and then the following year, in October, 1969, the radical underground group known as the Weathermen blew the statue up. City officials put the statue back together again and unveiled the repaired statue on May 4, 1970; again, on the anniversary. The Weathermen blew it up again in October, 1970. The statue was eventually reconstructed and placed in the lobby of the Chicago police headquarters. Clearly, at least for some Americans, Haymarket remained a powerful symbol of repression.

We'll have to leave it there in this discussion of the Haymarket bombing of 1886. For our next lecture, we'll explore the story of the Spanish American War and the end of American isolationism. Thank you.

1898 The End of Isolation—War with Spain

Lecture 28

Americans long believed they had a special mission to spread democracy—but only by example, not intervention—until the United States emerged as a world power in the late 19th century. After helping Cuban nationalists overthrow Spanish colonial rule, the U.S. government was reluctant to grant full independence to the Cubans. Supporting the spread of democracy while simultaneously thwarting it would become a vexing hallmark of American foreign policy in the 20th and early 21st centuries.

In the 19th century, many Americans believed isolationism was essential to maintain the republic. Sometimes world events imposed themselves on the United States, and sometimes the United States engaged in local imperialism through territorial acquisition. But international adventurism was to be avoided at all costs.

The policy of isolationism was based on two points: avoiding foreign influence and leading by example. The former was established by George Washington in his farewell address. The latter—sometimes called the “city upon a hill” ideal, goes back to the arrival of the Puritans in America. Over time, the 17th-century religious notion of America as a beacon of Christianity morphed into an 18th- and 19th-century secular notion of America as a beacon of democracy.

Then, in the late 19th century, a multifaceted argument in favor of American internationalism (even imperialism) emerged:

- The American frontier had been closed and some worried American values of individualism, entrepreneurship, democracy, and freedom would disappear with it.
- Many American policymakers and business interests worried that European powers were dividing up the world and the United States might lose out.

- Economists blamed the Panic of 1893 on American overproduction and cried out for new markets.
- A small but influential number of Americans, led by Theodore Roosevelt, asserted that the United States simply needed a war every now and again to maintain its masculine vigor.
- Many white Americans subscribed to the theory that it was the “white man’s burden” to civilize the “inferior” races.
- Finally, the most popular argument for American internationalism was idealism—showcasing democracy and human rights was no longer enough.

All of these fears and problems could be addressed by American acquisition of foreign territory.

In 1868, Cubans launched a 10-year rebellion against Spanish colonial rule that was brutally crushed. In 1895, a second Cuban rebellion began, and the Spanish adopted even more harsh policies, including reconcentration camps where huge numbers of civilians were herded to cut them off from the rebels. These camps lacked adequate food and sanitation, and tens of thousands of Cubans died in them. The American yellow press filled their pages with lurid stories of the atrocities and argued that the United States had to support the Cuban freedom fighters.

President William McKinley was concerned the conflict was hurting American investments in Cuba, so he pressured the Spanish to end the human rights violations. The Spanish did so, even offering Cuba limited self-rule, but the Cuban rebels rejected the reforms and insisted on complete independence.

Then, on February 15, 1898, the U.S. battleship *Maine* exploded in Havana Harbor, killing about 260 American sailors. Modern studies agree the explosion was likely a boiler accident, but American public opinion, inflamed by the yellow press, was convinced it was an act of war by Spain. On April 25, Congress declared war on Spain.

There were two main fronts in the Spanish-American War; the first and most important was the Philippines, which America captured on May 1, in the Battle of Manila Bay. The first troops landed in Cuba on June 22, among them Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders. On July 1, they and the 10th Negro Cavalry won the Battle of San Juan Hill. On July 3, the navy destroyed the Spanish fleet in Santiago Bay. On July 25, the United States seized Puerto Rico. On August 12, a cease fire was

All of these fears and problems could be addressed by American acquisition of foreign territory.

signed. The United States had acquired Hawaii, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam. Cuba gained nominal independence but remained under U.S. dominance for decades to come.

Over the next two decades, the United States engaged in additional imperialist forays, such as the creation of Panama; three occupations of Nicaragua; and invasions of Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti.

Although America's imperial holdings paled by comparison to those of the great European powers, the end of the Spanish-American War marked a decisive turning point in U.S. history. From this point forward, the U.S. would again and again slough off isolationism and embrace internationalism. ■

Suggested Reading

Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*.

Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*.

Silbey, *A War of Frontier and Empire*.

Thomas, *The War Lovers*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did most Americans before the 1890s believe meddling in international affairs would endanger the republic?
2. Was concern for human rights the primary motivation behind America's decision to declare war on Spain in 1898?

1898 The End of Isolation—War with Spain

Lecture 28—Transcript

Hello again. Let's start this lecture by heading back to 1796 and George Washington's farewell address. Washington chose to impart what he thought was vital advice to the new republic, and among the many things he said one stands out. Let's listen: "Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence ... the [attention] of a free people ought to be constantly awake; since history and experience prove, that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of Republican Government." Essentially, Washington was warning against the U.S. getting involved in foreign affairs. It's not quite isolationism, but something pretty close to it.

Clearly, something happened to the United States between 1796 and the 20th century, because the United States has gone on to become one of the most powerful and active nations in world affairs. To answer how this happened, today we take up the story of one of the major turning points in American history and American foreign policy: the Spanish American War, and the origins of American imperialism and American internationalism. Before we go any further, let's set out our objectives for this lecture. We'll focus on four things: First, we'll look at America's largely isolationist foreign policy in the 19th century and why many Americans believed that isolationism was essential for maintaining their republic. Then we'll look at several key factors that led to many Americans in the late 19th century coming to argue that the United States needed to take a more aggressive role in world affairs. Then we'll explore how all of this came together in the Spanish American War. Then finally, we'll look at the course of American imperialism and internationalism in the 20th century.

OK, let's start by looking at America's largely isolationist foreign policy in the 19th century. From the American Revolution to the 1890s, the preferred foreign policy posture of the United States was isolationism. Of course, it was never possible for America to maintain this completely and to stay completely out of international affairs. Sometimes world events imposed themselves on the United States; the War of 1812 offers an excellent example of this. At other times, the United States engaged in what we might call "local imperialism," dramatically expanding the size of the nation through

territorial acquisition. Sometimes this was accomplished with cash, as was the case with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803; and other times it occurred by military conquest, as was the case in the Mexican War of 1846. But for the most part, Americans did not see this activity as international adventurism. That was to be avoided at all costs.

This policy of isolationism was based on two points. First, the need to avoid foreign influence: The first element of traditional U.S. isolationism was the conviction that alliances with foreign powers would doom the American republic, basically because they would lead to America being sucked into a destructive European war. This principle was established, as we noted earlier, by George Washington in his famous farewell address. In it he essentially argued the United States should not enter into alliances with foreign powers. The second principle of American isolationism was what we might call “leading by example,” or the “city upon a hill” example. From the very beginning of the United States, Americans shared the belief that theirs was a nation with a special mission: to spread the virtues of democracy and republican institutions around the world. But nearly every American agreed, however, that there was only one way to accomplish this, and that was by example rather than military conquest. America would exist as a “city upon a hill,” demonstrating by its enjoyment of wealth and peace the superiority of republican government over monarchy.

Now this idea of a “city upon a hill,” one of the most quoted phrases in all of American politics, goes way back, as you’ll probably remember, to 1630 and the arrival of the Puritans in America. Back then, it was a call to Christian utopianism; but over time, this 17th-century religious notion of America as a beacon of Christianity gradually morphed into an 18th-century and 19th-century secular notion of America as a beacon of democracy and republican institutions. This theme of “the world is watching” appeared in innumerable speeches and works of art in the 19th century. Perhaps the most vivid example of it is the Statue of Liberty. When the statue was unveiled in 1886, no one thought of it as a monument to immigration; that came later. Rather, the statue was a symbol of republican and democratic values. Indeed, few Americans know this, but the original name of the statue was “Liberty Enlightening the World.” She’s carrying in her hand a tablet that reads July 4, 1776, the birth of the republic. Furthermore, the statue faces east, out

over the Atlantic Ocean toward Europe; and the message of the Statue of Liberty is very clear: “Hey, rest of the world. Look at us. You want some of this peace, prosperity, and freedom? Well cast off your kings, your landed aristocracies, your established churches and become a republic.” Again, America would spread this message by example; not by imperialism, not by military conquest.

So what happened? We know that somewhere along the line the United States abandoned these isolationist principles to take a more aggressive role in world affairs. How else to explain America’s involvement in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the two wars in the Persian Gulf, not to mention the leading role the U.S. played in establishing the United Nations and NATO? This shift started in the late 19th century as America emerged as one of the world’s leading industrial powers. Many Americans at this time came to believe that American economic power required that the nation take a greater role in global affairs. By 1900, the United States had done just that. It had launched a war against Spain that quickly led to the acquisition of territories halfway around the globe, most notably Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines; and while these holdings paled in comparison to the global empires of England, France, Germany, and Belgium, there was no denying that the United States by 1900, by any definition, had become an imperial power.

Before we go any further, we should pause to define the term “imperialism.” In essence, “imperialism” means “the policy of extending a nation’s authority over other nations by territorial acquisition or by the establishment of economic and political control.” It’s also known in some quarters as “colonialism.”

What happened? Why the sudden turn from isolationism to imperialism? In essence, there emerged in the late 19th century a multifaceted argument in favor of American internationalism, if not outright imperialism. This argument consisted of six points. Let’s look at each one in turn: The first one we’ll look at is called the “Frontier Argument.” Following the Census of 1890, the United States Census Department issued a startling claim: The American frontier, they said, had been closed. Some Americans interpreted this news as a triumph. For centuries, Americans had struggled to push the

frontier westward, to subdue the wilderness; I mean, that's what Manifest Destiny was all about. Now, apparently, in the early 1890s we'd gone and done it; and many people saw this as a cause for great celebration. But there were others who really fretted over this news, especially a historian named Frederick Jackson Turner. In 1893, he published what eventually became known as the "frontier thesis." The frontier, according to Turner, had played an indispensable role in fostering American individualism, entrepreneurship, democracy, equality and freedom; and now that the frontier was gone, what did this mean for the future of these really core American values? Didn't a loss of the frontier mean fading democracy? Didn't it mean diminished equality; weakened individualism; lost manliness? In other words, was the American republic now doomed with the loss of the frontier? No, said advocates of internationalism—they had a good answer for this—because now the U.S. has the power, now it can establish new frontiers by acquiring foreign territories around the globe; and that would ensure that future generations of restless Americans would have the opportunity to experience the positive effects of the frontier.

The second argument in favor of internationalism or imperialism was the one concerning American security. Many American policymakers, not to mention many business interests, looked at how quickly the European powers were dividing up the world and they worried: Was the United States about to get shut out of the global marketplace? Was American national security at risk if America sat back and allowed the great European powers to gain control of the world by seizing all the significant militarily strong points? You've probably seen cartoons from this period that show literally the leaders of Europe gathered around a table with carving knives cutting up parts of the globe, Africa and Asia and so forth. While most Americans were not ready to get into this territorial conquest game along with the other European powers, they did come to support the idea that the United States at the very least needed to build a strong navy. This idea was popularized by a naval officer named Alfred Thayer Mahan who in 1890 authored a widely influential book entitled *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*. Its thesis was that all great powers in history—all of them—have become great and powerful by virtue of a large navy; and this was a very persuasive argument, and all the right people, including Teddy Roosevelt, read this. The Navy read it, too; and in the course of the next few years, the Navy, in the 1890s, built

200 ships, which rapidly brought the United States up by 1900 to be the third largest navy in the world.

Another argument was the economic argument; or the argument that the United States needed more markets. This was triggered by the Panic of 1893. The 1890s was largely a Depression decade—25 percent unemployment, massive numbers of business failures—and many economists argued that the cause of this meltdown effectively was overproduction. In a sense, American factories were producing more goods than the American consumer could consume. In other words, U.S. manufacturers had basically gotten too good at what they did; and the solution, most economists said, was to find new markets abroad, both through increased trade (the traditional way) and, if need be, the acquisition of foreign territories that we could then turn into mercantilist outposts that would produce raw materials that we needed and they would then also buy American finished goods.

A fourth argument for this growing trend towards internationalism was militarism, or what some people called the “martial spirit.” A small but influential number of Americans, led by Theodore Roosevelt, asserted that the United States simply needed a war. Every now and then, America needed a war, and it was vital to the maintenance of its masculine vigor. It had been several generations since the Civil War and it seemed to Roosevelt that the average American male was growing soft and effeminate. The growth of white collar work, of course—which only grew more popular in the late 19th century—only made this situation worse. We get a sense of Roosevelt’s thinking in the mid-1890s when a crisis blew up over Venezuela that created tension between the United States and Great Britain. Roosevelt, in the midst of this crisis, clamored for war, and he wrote in a letter to a friend, “Personally, I hope the fight will come soon. The clamor from the peace faction has convinced me that this country needs a war. Let the fight come if it must.” Roosevelt’s making the case that every now and again you need a war, and this is something that every generation needs to keep America strong.

A fifth argument in favor of internationalism and imperialism was a racist argument, or what in Europe was called the “white man’s burden.” This argument was largely borrowed from Great Britain, that’s where the phrase

was first coined, and it went like this: The dark races of the world live in savagery; therefore the imperial powers must take up the “white man’s burden.” Another dimension to this was that primitives were “unfit for self-rule,” incapable of democracy; therefore, the imperial powers must rule them. Another dimension was that primitive societies were “wasting” the natural resources that God had provided them, so therefore imperial powers were obligated to take those natural resources and put them to good use. A lot of these ideas were summed up by a prominent American intellectual named John W. Burgess who said, “There is no [human] right to the state of barbarism.” There are a lot of cartoons that emphasize this theme of civilization on the one hand on the part of the United States and Western Europe and the primitiveness of the developing world and how America’s literally going to school and teach these Third World peoples, often depicted as children to emphasize that point.

A sixth notion was the “crusader nation” ideal. This was a very popular argument in favor of American internationalism; essentially idealism. The longstanding tradition of simply showcasing democracy and human rights to the world—this sort of lead by example—was no longer enough, people said. That might have been appropriate when the United States was a small and weak republic; but now, in the late 19th century, it had attained a position among the world powers, and wasn’t there a moral obligation to use that power to actually promote democracy and human rights, especially when the forces of tyranny threatened to triumph over democracy and human rights? This is sort of like saying if you’re a big, strong person and you see somebody being mugged across the street, aren’t you obligated—morally obligated—to run to that person’s assistance? That’s the argument in a nutshell. This was mainly an academic question in America until the 1890s, when suddenly a concrete example of tyranny attempting to crush democracy and human rights began to unfold only 90 miles off the tip of Florida.

OK, let’s see how all of this comes together, all of these ideas come together, in the Spanish American War. The story of the Spanish American War begins back in the late 1860s. It was in 1868 that the Cubans launched a rebellion against Spanish colonial rule, and this rebellion lasted 10 years before it was brutally crushed by the Spanish military. Cuba was the last major European colony in Latin America, and this rebellion drew a lot of attention

and sympathy on the part of some Americans. Cuba also had tremendous economic potential, so it also attracted the interests and the investment dollars of American business leaders. Then, in 1895, a second Cuban rebellion began, and this time it was led by the patriot Jose Marti. The conflict took the form of classic guerilla warfare, where the Spanish held control over the cities while rebels controlled the countryside. The administration of President Grover Cleveland, prodded by American business interests who were worried about their investments there, pressured the Spanish to adopt a more enlightened, more humane form of colonial rule. But at the time, Spain ignored these overtures and instead adopted a more harsh policy. The most notorious element of this was the “reconcentration camps.” This is where they took huge numbers of Cuban civilians and herded them into camps to cut them off from contact with the rebels. These camps lacked adequate food and sanitation and tens of thousands of Cubans died in them of starvation and of disease.

The American public began to learn of these human rights atrocities in the pages of two sensationalist newspapers: William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*. These two papers enjoyed national circulation and they were locked in an intense competition for readers. Pulitzer and Hearst knew that the public loved stories of sex, scandal, and corruption, but they soon discovered that Americans also wanted to read about the human rights crisis and Spanish atrocities in Cuba. Their over-the-top style earned them the label the “yellow press,” and they responded to this demand by filling their pages with lurid stories. Let’s listen to an example of some of this “yellow journalism” that became so popular and played a key role into pushing America into war: “Blood on the roadsides, blood on the fields, blood on the doorsteps, blood, blood, blood!” The old, the young, the weak, the crippled—all butchered without mercy.” Another one from the *New York World* in a similar vein asked the poignant question: “Is there no nation wise enough, brave enough to aid this blood-smitten land?”

Pulitzer and Hearst were literally pushing America towards intervention. This last quote touched on a theme that became increasingly popular in these papers: the argument that the United States had an obligation to come to the aid of the Cuban freedom fighters. Many interventionists who supported

this ideal cited the vital role that France had played in helping Americans win their independence from the British during the Revolution; shouldn't we do that now that we're strong and powerful, help the Cubans do the same? In 1896, as the Cuban rebellion dragged on, both the Republican and Democratic parties included planks in their platforms calling for Cuban independence, a good measure of how popular this idea was getting. The Republican candidate William McKinley won the election in 1896, and his administration soon began to focus on Cuba. McKinley's main concern with the conflict was that it was hurting American business investments there, threatening them; so McKinley's administration pressured the Spanish government to adopt reforms and end human rights violations.

By late 1897, the Spanish government effectively did just that: They offered Cuba limited self-rule. But the Cuban rebels rejected the reforms and insisted on complete independence. Relations between Spain and the United States quickly deteriorated. In early 1898, the *New York Journal* published a letter from the Spanish minister to the United States that mocked McKinley as weak, and this just enflamed pro-war spirit. Then on February 15, 1898, the U.S. battleship *Maine* exploded in Havana harbor, killing 260 American sailors. Modern studies of this tragedy have agreed that the explosion probably caused by a boiler accident within the ship, not the result of Spanish treachery; but American public opinion, inflamed by the yellow press—as you can see if you've ever seen any of the front pages of the *World* or the *Journal*—became convinced that the sinking of the *Maine* was an act of war by Spain.

The sinking of the *Maine* did not trigger the war, but it limited President McKinley's diplomatic options. Pressure to intervene militarily in Cuba began to mount from the public, the press, the business community with investments in Cuba, and members of McKinley's Republican Party. The French ambassador in Washington reported back to his government that “a sort of bellicose fury has seized the American nation.” He was right. Towards the end of March, McKinley issued an ultimatum to the Spanish government: They must call an immediate cease fire, end the reconcentration camps, and agree to American arbitration of the conflict. This last point strongly implied a process that would lead ultimately to Cuban independence. Spain quickly called a cease fire and they ended the reconcentration camps, but by then

McKinley's mind was already made up. On April 11, he submitted a request to Congress for the authority to use force in Cuba "in the name of humanity, in the name of civilization, in behalf of endangered American interests."

Two weeks later, on April 25, 1898, Congress declared war on Spain. In this war, there were basically two main fronts. The first and the most important was actually not Cuba where all the trouble began, but halfway around the world in the Philippines. This Spanish colony, essentially a huge collection of islands, was a potentially valuable strategic asset in the Pacific for the United States. American expansionists and business interests were keen to expand access to lucrative markets in Asia; and the Navy also looked at the Philippines as a valuable refueling station right there in the middle of the Pacific. So the first key battle in the Spanish American War actually took place only a week after the declaration of war. On May 1, Commodore George Dewey led America's Pacific fleet into Manila Bay whereupon they quickly destroyed the overmatched Spanish fleet; and soon they dispatched an occupying army ashore, basically to secure American possession of the islands.

It was fully two months later that the American army began its assault on Cuba. The first troops landed on June 22, and they were poorly organized and poorly outfitted. Many of these soldiers were recent volunteers who'd received hardly any training at all. The army made things worse by providing antiquated rifles, spoiled food, and, of all things, wool uniforms for combat in the sweltering Cuban summer. More than 5,000 of these men would die in short order from disease. Only 379 Americans actually died from combat-related wounds. Among this somewhat ragtag army was a regiment that called itself the "Rough Riders." This was organized by Theodore Roosevelt. At the time when the war broke out, he quickly resigned his position as Assistant Secretary of the Navy as soon as the war was declared. We know why, because as we noted earlier Roosevelt had long been an advocate of aggressive and expansionist foreign policy; so he was thrilled to have this opportunity to fight a war because he believed that periodic wars were essential for maintaining national manliness. He also saw the war as a superb opportunity to garner headlines, and Roosevelt loved headlines.

The moment of glory for the Rough Riders came only a week and a half later. On July 1, 1898, when the American army attacked the Spanish in the hills on the outskirts of the capital city of San Juan, Roosevelt's Rough Riders in that day's battle performed well, and Theodore Roosevelt had at least one bullet pass through his hat. It should be noted at this point that they did not charge up San Juan Hill; they actually went up nearby Kettle Hill. The soldiers who played the pivotal role in seizing the much more significant San Juan Hill were African American members of the 10th Negro Cavalry. But Roosevelt's unmatched penchant for self-promotion and the media's basically disinterest in hailing the achievements of black soldiers led the public to believe that the Rough Riders had pretty much singlehandedly won the day.

The rest of the war in Cuba unfolded rapidly. On July 3, the U.S. Navy destroyed the Spanish fleet in Santiago Bay. The city of Santiago fell on July 17. On July 25, the United States military seized another Spanish holding, Puerto Rico. The war was pretty much over at this point, and on August 12, both sides signed a cease fire ending all hostilities between Spain and the United States in the fronts of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. In the ensuing treaty that followed, the United States acquired control of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and the Pacific island of Guam. Cuba gained a nominal amount of independence but remained under U.S. dominance for decades to come. Quite suddenly, the nation that had been long committed to isolationism had now become an imperial power.

But the United States soon discovered that expelling the Spanish from Cuba and the rest of these holdings was really the easy part. The people that they had freed from Spanish rule made it very clear right afterward that they wanted their freedom; they wanted their independence. But the United States government decided it was best—at least in America's interest—to go slow in granting full independence and full democratic freedoms to the Cubans and the Puerto Ricans. In the Philippines, the United States' refusal to recognize Filipino self-determination led to the Filipino Insurrection. This was a horribly bloody war in which, at the end of it, about 100,000 Filipinos were killed. This conflict would give rise to a full-blown anti-imperialist movement. It included many prominent Americans, people like Mark Twain, and they basically argued that imperialism was antithetical to republican values.

Over the next two decades, the U.S. engaged in many, many more imperialist forays. In 1904, with tacit U.S. approval and support, a rebellion in the country of Colombia led to the creation of a pro-U.S. nation called Panama; and then they very quickly agreed to allow the United States to build the Panama Canal there. On three other occasions—in 1909, in 1912, and in 1926—U.S. troops occupied Nicaragua. In 1914, U.S. forces invaded Mexico during the Mexican Revolution. In 1916, U.S. troops occupied the Dominican Republic. In 1915, U.S. troops occupied Haiti. This contradiction of supporting the spread of democracy internationally while simultaneously thwarting or at least limiting it in certain places would become a vexing hallmark of American foreign policy in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Finally, let's look at the course of American imperialism and internationalism in the 20th century. Although America's imperial holdings paled by comparison to those of the great European powers, the end of the Spanish American War marked a decisive turning point in American history. From this point forward, the United States would again and again slough off isolationism and embrace internationalism. Isolationism returned in the early 20th century, but in 1917 the United States entered into World War I on behalf of England and France to "make the world safe for democracy." Isolationism then returned in the 1920s and 1930s, but in 1941 the United States plunged into World War II to defeat the Third Reich and Imperial Japan. The Cold War, as we'll see in a subsequent lecture, pretty much ended this phase of American isolationism.

That does it for now. We'll see you next time.

1900 The Promised Land—The Great Migration

Lecture 29

The early years of the 20th century witnessed a slow but growing flow of African American migrants to the North. Black leaders and entrepreneurs encouraged migrants to head for “The Promised Land,” and northern businesses actively recruited black laborers to fill vacant factory jobs. Some 7 million African Americans moved to the North between 1890 and 1970, spurring the cause of civil rights and greatly increasing the impact of African American culture on white American society.

The “Report on Peonage” (1908) by the United States Department of Justice said thousands of poor blacks in the South were working under labor contracts that held them in a quasi-slave status. No wonder so many African Americans headed North at the start of the 20th century.

The Great Migration had a lot in common with foreign immigration to America. The push factors were crushing poverty, the oppressive Jim Crow laws, segregation, disenfranchisement, and violence, including lynchings; the pull factors were expanded job opportunities, voting rights, good schools, and far less segregation and violence.

The Great Migration had specific triggering event. It began slowly in the 1890s and 1900s. The first 400,000 migrants were the pioneer generation who in many cases established black communities in cities where none had existed. Some of them envisioned the North as a place freedom and opportunity, and this inspired them to bold action. Philip Payton, for example, set about transforming Harlem—then an elite white suburb—into America’s largest African American neighborhood.

Many blacks saw the North as a sort of biblical Promised Land, thanks to letters from early migrants. Such letters led to very distinct settlement patterns known as chain migrations. Several African American newspapers in the North became enthusiastic boosters of the Great Migration, urging blacks to better themselves and their collective status. Northern businesses

also actively recruited in the South in search of cheap labor, especially after the outbreak of World War I. White Southerners actually opposed the Great Migration for this reason, fearing the loss of black labor.

World War I turned the steady stream of black migrants into a torrent. Some 300,000 moved north in the war years alone to fill the millions of jobs that soldiers had left behind, to replace the labor inflow from now-stunted

European immigration, and to meet increased production demand for war materiel.

They fought to preserve freedom for a nation that denied them many freedoms.

Black men moved into low-paying, low-skill jobs in industries like auto and steel manufacturing, meatpacking, and mining, earning

less than their white counterparts but more than they would have in the South. Black women overwhelmingly entered the workforce as domestic servants. Again, they were paid less than whites but earned much more than in the South, and demand for servants was so high their wages rose sharply into the 1920s.

Immigrants from Poland, Greece, Italy, Russia, and so forth faced many hardships and challenges, including discrimination, but their European ancestry would eventually earn them the status of “white.” African Americans would not have that built-in advantage; they faced intense racism and discrimination in the North.

Five million Americans joined the armed forces during World War I; 400,000 of them were black, proportionately higher than their numbers in the population as a whole. They fought to preserve freedom for a nation that denied them many freedoms, but black leaders encouraged enlistment; they saw in the war an opportunity for African Americans to prove themselves and thereby lay claim to their full measure of American freedom. However, in the immediate aftermath of the war, African Americans faced a wave of violence, including anti-black riots and continued lynching.

The Great Migration was a turning point in American history because it transformed the demographic profile of the nation. It brought whites and blacks into greater contact and triggered a cultural ferment in American life. Most African Americans had lived in poverty and rural isolation, but the migration created huge urban communities of African Americans, which led to a flourishing of African American culture, from writers like Langston Hughes to singers like Ella Fitzgerald and countless artists, actors, and intellectuals. These voices forever changed American culture.



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, gottlieb 11911.

Jazz culture grew from the great artists fostered in the new urban black communities.

The Great Migration spurred organizations like the NAACP and the Urban League to become more aggressive in pushing for civil rights, sowing the seeds of the modern civil rights movement. Since the 1970s, African Americans have been moving southward in a New Great Migration, thanks to the successes of the civil rights movement and the rapid economic development of the Sun Belt states. ■

Suggested Reading

Lemann, *The Promised Land*.

Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways is it helpful to think of African American migrants as similar to European immigrants? At what point is this comparison no longer valid? Why?
2. How did the Great Migration reshape American society?

1900 The Promised Land—The Great Migration

Lecture 29—Transcript

Hello. Good to see you once again. Welcome back to our latest exploration of a key turning point in American history. Today, it's the Great Migration, a movement that saw hundreds of thousands and eventually millions of African Americans leave the American South and settle in the North.

Let's start out, like we often do, with a story. In February of 1901, a Florida lawyer named Fred Cubberly paid a visit to a local farmer. While the two men chatted in his small shack, they heard a commotion and then saw an African American couple and their child standing in the doorway. Behind them was a white man holding a gun. The gunman explained that the black man, George Huggins, had been working on his farm until recently when he and his family just disappeared. Huggins, the gunman said, owed him \$40 and he "would compel Huggins to return to his service, or kill him." Huggins and his wife begged Cubberly and the other farmer to pay his debt. When they declined to do this, the gunman simply just marched Huggins and his family right out the door and down the road, back into a life of brutal, low-paid, forced labor and inhumane housing conditions. Cubberly was stunned by what he saw. He'd heard about such practices in Florida and other parts of the South, but he'd never seen it in person.

Just how extensive was this practice known as "peonage" or "debt peonage?" Cubberly began to research. He also contacted federal authorities who advised him to find a "test case" that could be brought to trial, and he quickly found one (because there were so many). The case eventually led to an extensive report gathered by the United States Department of Justice called the "Report on Peonage," and it was published in 1908. It revealed hundreds of thousands of African Americans, poor blacks, were living in the South as peons, trapped in a brutally exploitive labor systems, debt, and violence that held them for all intents and purposes in a quasi-slave status. Reforms as a result of this report were eventually instituted, and the system of Southern peonage gradually disappeared over the next few decades. This extraordinary and little-known story provides us with a vivid hint as to why so many African Americans began leaving the South to settle in the North, and why so many blacks believed the North represented a "Promised Land."

Before we go any further in examining the Great Migration in the early 20th century, let's set out some objectives for this lecture. Over the course of this talk, we'll cover four main points: First, we'll look at the status of African Americans in the South in roughly around the year 1900. Then we'll begin to detail the beginnings of what we call the "Great Migration." Next, we'll explore how the onset of World War I and how this played a key role in accelerating the Great Migration. Finally, we'll look at the long-term effects of the Great Migration.

OK, let's get started. It's helpful when considering the Great Migration to think of it like immigration. Now, there are obvious differences between African American migration within the United States and the migration of immigrants from Europe to the United States. But let's look at the common traits for a moment, because they're very instructive. We noted in our lecture about immigration that people who choose to pack up and leave their homelands do so for a combination of reasons, basically what we call "push" and "pull" factors. Push factors are those things that make life difficult at home: war, famine, poverty, violence, persecution. Pull factors are just the opposite; they are the things that draw a person to a particular place: peace, prosperity, the rule of law, tolerance. This is precisely the kind of calculus that African Americans in the South began to employ in the early 20th century.

Let's start with the push factors; or let's put this in the form of a question: What's the status of African Americans in roughly 1900? In 1900, 90 percent of African Americans in the United States lived in the American South under a Jim Crow order that we detailed quite extensively in our lecture on the Colfax Massacre and the end of Reconstruction. Most blacks lived in rural poverty as sharecroppers where they faced a life of poverty and debt. Many thousands of others, as we noted in the introduction, lived in this system called "peonage." The vast majority of African Americans were also denied the right to vote. Blacks who lived in towns and cities faced day to day indignities of segregation; things that required them to sit in special railroad cars, attend separate and inferior schools, and so on. Life in the South in roughly 1900 for most African Americans was very difficult, but it also carried the ever-present threat of violence. Lynchings, for example, had reached epidemic proportions in the 1890s, averaging 183 per year; that's one murder every two days. In the next decade, 1900–1910, the numbers

declined a bit but still remained incredibly high, averaging 87 killings per year. And those were just the murders; think of how many beatings, how many humiliations, how much vandalism African Americans faced on a daily basis. For many blacks, it was less dramatic than all this, it was just simply the day to day humiliations that they were forced to endure.

The story of Joseph Brown is very instructive here. Brown lived in Atlanta, and one day he felt sick so he went and stopped at an Atlanta drug store and asked for a glass of water. The man he asked was standing behind a soda fountain counter with row upon row of glasses, but he directed Brown to go behind the store where he found a bucket of dirty and soapy water. Brown remembered this; he said, “When I left that store and walking back up the hill home, I said, ‘God, if you will give me strength and give me my health, this will never happen again.’” Brown would eventually leave Georgia for a new life in the North.

Now let’s turn our attention to the Great Migration. The Great Migration had no specific beginning point; it had no single triggering event. But we do know that the migration eventually settled more than seven million blacks in the North, and it started slowly in the 1890s. In the 1890s, about 185,000 blacks headed from the South to the North. A little bit more than that number came in the next decade, 1900–1910, about 194,000. Again, drawing comparisons to the tradition of immigration, we should think of this number—at almost 400,000 African American migrants—as the “pioneer generation,” just like the tens of thousands of Irish immigrants who came to the United States in the 1820s and 1830s, well before the Great Famine of the 1840s. Those early Irish pioneer immigrants established the first Irish neighborhoods in America in large American cities like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Within these neighborhoods, the Irish established key institutions like churches, charitable societies, fraternal orders, newspapers, saloons, theaters, and all the key things of a neighborhood; so that when the massive wave of Famine Irish came after 1845, they arrived to find an already preexisting Irish infrastructure. That’s precisely what these early-arriving pioneer African Americans did in these first decades of the Migration. In some cities they established black communities where none had existed; in other places like New York and Chicago where small African American communities existed,

these pioneers helped expand their numbers and strengthen the institutions that were there.

Many of these pioneers brought a vision of the North as a place of freedom and opportunity, and this notion often inspired them to bold action. My favorite example of this idea of opportunity is embodied in the story of a man named Philip Payton. Philip Payton arrived in New York in 1899 from North Carolina, and like most African Americans he struggled to find steady work, even though he had two years of college education. Eventually he landed a job in a real estate office, but as a custodian. While he worked there, he paid attention and he learned the business of real estate; and by 1901, just two years after getting to New York, he was managing and buying apartment buildings housing black tenants. In 1904, he opened the Afro-American Realty Company and set his sights on Harlem in northern Manhattan. You probably think of Harlem as a famous black neighborhood—which, of course, it is—but in 1904 it was being developed as a neighborhood for upper-class and middle-class white families. Here's a typical advertisement that ran in local newspapers to give you an idea of the kind of elite status of the place: "Great care is taken of the property to preserve its exclusive appearance and a general air of being well looked after pervades the surroundings." You get the idea.

By 1904, after years of fast and furious speculative building, the Harlem real estate bubble burst; and investors there were so desperate to find tenants, but they didn't have any, the tenants simply weren't coming. Enter Philip Payton. He had a vision of transforming Harlem into a vast neighborhood for an ever-growing population of African Americans. At the time, black New Yorkers were confined by segregation basically to a dreadful neighborhood known as San Juan Hill—this is on the west side of Manhattan—and there African Americans lived in some of the worst housing, they faced a lot of violence from local white gangs, and a hostile police force. In fact, in 1900 there was a brutal race riot in this neighborhood that saw hundreds of blacks beaten by mobs of roving whites. Philip Payton's idea was simple: He would approach these desperate white developers up in Harlem and say, "Look, I have a deal for you. For a modest fee, I will find and manage rent-paying tenants for your empty buildings, with only one catch: They'll be black tenants."

Initially, Payton's offers were rejected; they simply wanted to keep the color line where it was. In fact, many white property owners organized to prevent blacks from moving in; they created organizations to stop this. But as more and more developers faced bankruptcy, Payton's offer started to seem like a lifeline that they simply could not refuse. Gradually, building by building, block by block, Payton brought in African American tenants. One black newspaper commented with a certain level of glee: "Although organizations to prevent the settling of colored citizens in certain sections of Harlem mushroom overnight, the colored invasion goes merrily along." By 1910—again, this is just a short period of time—the former elite white suburb had been transformed into the largest black neighborhood in the United States, with a population of 50,000 residents and counting. This means in this neighborhood they had established not only a large neighborhood but with all those institutions—churches, charitable societies, fraternal orders, newspapers, restaurants, nightclubs, theaters, you name it—and these things were in place just as the Great Migration really got under way. We'll talk more about Harlem towards the end of our lecture.

If we keep with our immigration model, what was it that drew this pioneer generation and then the massive wave of the Great Migration up to the North? In other words, what were the pull factors? Simply put, as in the case of immigration, the pull factors represented the flip side of the push factors. African Americans saw the North as a place of expanded opportunities—particularly job opportunities—they saw it as a place of voting rights, good schools, and far less Jim Crow segregation and violence; in short, they saw it as a land of greater freedom and opportunity. That's why many African Americans saw the North in biblical terms; they referred to it as "The Promised Land," a phrase that became very popular at the time. One group of black families from Mississippi, for example, literally broke into song when their train crossed the Ohio River and brought them into the North; they sang "I Am Bound for the Land of Canaan." One black man from Georgia, when interviewed about what was triggering this migration, said, "In my opinion the strongest factor in this migration is a desire to escape harsh and unfair treatment, to secure a larger degree of personal liberty, better advantages for children, and a living wage." Of course, like immigrants who believed rumors that America had streets paved with gold, African Americans would soon find out that the North was in many ways better than the South,

but it was certainly not a paradise; not really a promised land. We'll talk more about the dark side of the Great Migration in just a bit.

Now let's ask a question: How did African Americans come to see the North after 1900 in these terms; what eventually triggered this great exodus? Here's another parallel with immigration, because we see the same three forces that triggered immigration as working on the Great Migration from the American South. First and foremost were letters from early migrants: Many early migrants, just like immigrants, wrote letters home telling people how things were going; and immigrants often—we know from reading immigrant letters—extolled the virtues of their new location and often downplayed the bad things. One man in Chicago wrote that living in the North had “just begun to” make him “feel like a man.” Let's listen to the rest of his letter, because it's very instructive as to the kind of spirit of opportunity and optimism that people felt when they moved North and the kind of information they conveyed back to their friends in the South. He continued: “My children are going to the same school with the whites and I don't have to [h]umble to no one. I have registered—Will vote the next election and there isn't any ‘yes sir’ and ‘no sir’—it's all yes and no Sam and Bill.”

He's conveying in very simple language an incredible difference between the North and the South. These kinds of letters, of which there were thousands and thousands of them, encouraged what's called “chain migration,” where one or two people go first and then write letters, and then send money, and then successively bring the rest of their family to join them, just like immigration from outside the United States. Then, once you bring your family members, usually that chain migration extends outward to more distant family, relatives, and neighbors; so you often had entire regions brought from the South to the North. This trend actually created several distinct settlement patterns for African Americans, just like with immigration: African Americans from Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia tended to settle mainly in the Northeast of the United States; African Americans from Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas mainly settled in the Midwest and in the West.

A second source of inspiration for immigration came from newspapers. A number of African American newspapers eventually became enthusiastic

boosters of the Great Migration; papers like the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *New York Age*, and especially the *Chicago Defender*. Let's take a moment to listen to what the *Chicago Defender* had to say in kind of a representative example of the enthusiastic editorials that they wrote explaining to African Americans that this was more than just a job opportunity; this was an opportunity for them to improve their race as a whole. Let's listen: "Every black man for the sake of his wife and daughters especially should leave even at financial sacrifice every spot in the south where his worth is not appreciated enough to give him the standing of a man and a citizen in the community." It's more than just about financial opportunity; it's about seizing more justice, better treatment as a citizen. Why did these papers preach this kind of message to African Americans in the South? Clearly they see this as a civil rights opportunity; an opportunity for the elevation of African Americans as a collective group within America; that if they could leave and go to the North, things would get better in general. The *Defender* at one point wrote, "Our chance is now"; it's kind of the representative phrase.

Many African Americans who read these enticements didn't have the money to get North, so they wrote letters to papers like the *Chicago Defender*, basically asking for help. Let's listen to one of these letters from a man in the Deep South; there are hundreds and hundreds of these letters in collections. He wrote to the editor:

Dear Sir: I have been reading the Chicago defender and seeing so many advertisements about the work in the north I thought to write you concerning my condition. I am working hard in the south and can hardly earn a living. I have a wife and one child and can hardly feed them. I thought to write and ask you for some information concerning how to get a pass for myself and family [by "pass" he means ticket]. ... I was out in town today talking to some of the men and they say if they could get passes that 30 or 40 of them would come.

You can see there's a great interest in the South to get to the North, but they often lacked money. This brings in the third factor that helped drawing in a large population out of the South: recruitment by businesses that were seeking cheap labor. This was especially true once World War I broke out.

Businesses sent recruiters to the South, they also distributed leaflets, to entice African Americans to migrate to the North; and they often did or helped pay for their tickets. These people, of course, painted a rosy picture of freedom and opportunity and built up enthusiasm for the North.

We should pause here to ask for a moment: How did white Southerners feel about this Great Migration that's taken place? We might think, given the level of racial antagonism in the South, they would be glad to see so many African Americans leave. But white Southerners actually opposed the Great Migration because they saw it as problematic; they realized that even though they didn't get along with African Americans, this was a source of cheap black labor. Let's listen to how one Southerner described the problem:

We can't afford to let him go; he means too much for us—financially. He works for little; his upkeep costs us little, for we can house him in any kind of shack, and make him pay us well for that; we do not have to be careful of his living conditions; he is good-natured, long-suffering, and if he should happen to give us trouble we can cope with that and the law will uphold us in anything we do.

In that last part, of course, they're implying that if African Americans get out of line they can resort to lynching or violence and the law would back them up.

As a result, many Southerners used violence and threats to keep African Americans in the South, but there was simply no stopping it; the Great Migration just kept growing. Chicago's African American population in this period more than doubled to 100,000. New York City's African American population jumped 66 percent to 150,000. In smaller cities like Detroit, their population soared from about 6,000 African Americans in 1910 to more than 40,000 by 1920; and these numbers kept soaring in the 1920s. Overall, the African American population in the North jumped 40 percent by 1940; so we can see it's a huge transfer of population. This growth was especially noticeable in big cities like New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Indianapolis. It was also noticeable in smaller cities like Gary, Indiana; Toledo, Ohio; Omaha, Nebraska; Flint, Michigan; Newark, New Jersey; Albany, New York.

In all, in total, between 1910 and 1940, 1.75 million African Americans moved North.

How did World War I play a role in the Great Migration? Simply put: It turned a steady stream of African American migrants into a torrent. About 300,000 African Americans moved into the North in the war years alone. Why was this the case; what was it about the war? Wars nearly always cause a labor shortage for three basic reasons: One, millions of people leave the regular workforce and go to the military; so you have a shortage of workers. Second, war often stops immigration; and it certainly did during World War I. In 1914, before the war began for us, a million immigrants came to the United States, but only 31,000 came in 1918; so you see a huge reduction in immigration, a big source of labor. Third, industry goes into overdrive to produce war materiel; so you have fewer workers and more work being required, so this creates a labor shortage. For America, World War I didn't begin until 1917; the war began in 1914, and the U.S. remained neutral for three years before entering the conflict. But even before the U.S. entered the war, the United States' industrial sector began churning out goods, and in so doing it had a major shortage of labor; and basically what's happening here is while England, France, and Germany are destroying each other in World War I, the United States is supplying massive amounts of industrial materiel to these countries. A couple of numbers kind of explain this: In 1914, the United States had a trade with the Allies—France and England—of about \$824 million; by 1916, that's ballooned to \$3.2 billion. Clearly, even before we the war began for the United States, we were part of that war and it was boosting our economy.

Where did African Americans find work when they got to the North? The simple answer is: at the bottom. Black men moved into low-paying, low-skill jobs in industries like auto, steel manufacturing, meatpacking, and mining; and they also not only took the lower-skill jobs—the harder jobs—but they also earned a lot less money than their white counterparts. They faced other problems: White workers often resented blacks in the workplace and they barred them from union membership. But even with these factors taken into account, wages in the North were much, much higher than they were in the South; and African Americans had a much greater range of options for places to work, so they could keep changing jobs to find one that was better than

the next. By 1920, almost a million African Americans held in industrial jobs. The same was true for black women. They overwhelmingly entered the workforce not as industrial workers but as domestic servants doing cooking, cleaning, and child care. They were paid a lot less than white women for the same kind of work, but, again, they earned far more money in the North than compared to the South; and, because demand for servants was so high, black women's wages actually rose very sharply in the 1920s.

What did blacks experience once they settled in the North? We know there were good reasons to get there; we know they established these large neighborhoods; what was the experience like? It was not easy, and there are a lot of reasons for this; and here is another parallel to the immigration experience. Most African Americans who came North were essentially peasant farmers; but then they ended up settling in exclusively urban neighborhoods, and went on to become the most urbanized people in the United States. This is exactly what happened to the Irish in the 19th century: rural peasants going to big cities and becoming heavily, highly urban people. But here's the immigration and great migration parallel stops: Simply put, race mattered far more than ethnicity. To be sure, immigrants from Poland, Greece, Italy, Russia, and so many places faced a lot of hardship and challenges, including a lot of discrimination; but their European ancestry meant that over time they would be seen as "white" Americans, and this is obviously an advantage that African Americans would not have. Instead, they faced intense racism in their migration into the North. Granted, the violence in the North was a lot less compared to that in the South; but nonetheless this limited the options and certainly diminished the experience of freedom for many African Americans in the North.

We should pause here to point out a different but related aspect of the African American experience during World War I; and by this I mean service in the military, because obviously blacks were not only just filling factories and working as domestics they're actually entering the armed forces. About five million Americans joined the armed forces during World War I, and of this number 400,000 were African Americans, which means that African Americans actually served in proportionately higher numbers relative to their overall population than did whites. We see a very similar thing happen in this war that we saw in previous wars. Black service in the American military

was full of—I guess the only way to put it—painful irony and contradiction, because African Americans were called upon in this war to fight for the cherished American ideals like freedom, justice, human rights, equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness even as these ideals were largely denied to them back home in the United States. Nonetheless, as in the American Civil War, black leaders saw World War I as an incredible opportunity for African Americans to prove themselves and thereby allow themselves to lay claim once they got home and once the war ended to their full measure of American freedom. *The Crisis*, which is a publication of the NAACP, made this point very explicitly: Black service in the war would help “make our own America a real land of the free.”

When the war was over, a mere 19 months after the United States entered, black leaders and newspaper editors reiterated this message of laying claim to civil rights. Let’s take a moment to listen to one of these writers. His name is James Weldon Johnson and what he wrote captured the spirit of this enthusiasm, if you want to call it that. He argued that the war had inspired a “most vital and far-reaching change” among African Americans. “He has been seized by the spirit that has taken hold of all the submerged classes of the world. . . . [H]e is striving to see that this war will mean for him just what it promises—democracy for all the people of the world.” Even though war is painful and destructive, African Americans saw a silver lining to this one.

In the long run—several decades and another World War later (World War II)—these ideals would, in fact, be fulfilled in the 1950s and in the 1960s. But in the immediate aftermath of World War I, African Americans faced a wave of violence. In 1919, there were 25 major anti-black riots in the North; and the worst one in the North took place in Chicago in July, 1919: 38 people were killed, hundreds were injured. The worst incident overall occurred in Tulsa, Oklahoma where a mob slaughtered 300 African Americans. There were also 76 African Americans lynched in the South in 1919, including 10 black soldiers. Dreadful as these riots were, African Americans kept on coming in the 1920s and beyond because no matter what, no matter how bad things got in the North, they were far worse in the American South.

What were the long-term effects of the Great Migration? What makes it a turning point in American history? There is one clear impact: the social

impact. The seven million African Americans who moved north transformed the profile of the United States. They redistributed the population of blacks in American more evenly and thereby brought white Americans into greater contact with African Americans. A second impact was a cultural impact: The Great Migration triggered a cultural ferment in American life among African Americans of enormous influence. Before the Great Migration, most African Americans lived in poverty and in rural isolation in the South; but the Migration created huge urban communities for African Americans, like Harlem, and this led to a flourishing of African American culture.

The most famous example of this was the Harlem Renaissance. It gathered writers and poets like Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes; singers like Paul Robeson, Billie Holiday, and Ella Fitzgerald; musicians like Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong; and countless artists, actors, and intellectuals; and these emerging voices forever changed American culture. Just think about jazz for a moment: Jazz was invented decades before, but it burst onto the national scene in the 1920s courtesy of the Great Migration. In a later era, African Americans would play a key role in the invention and popularization of rock and roll. There's a third impact: the civil rights impact. In many ways, we can see the seeds of the modern civil rights movement being sown during the Great Migration. It spurred the formation of famous organizations like the NAACP in 1909 and the National Urban League in 1910, and these organizations began fighting for civil rights in the 19-teens, laying the groundwork for the formal civil rights movement of the 1950s and the 1960s. In fact, many early challenges to school segregation originated in Northern cities before the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. Also, if we look at the rise of African American political power, we see clearly that it began in Northern cities in the 1960s and 1970s. On a side note, it's also worth noting that it was no accident that Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball in 1947 playing for a Major League team in New York City. It should be clear at this point that the Great Migration had an enormous impact on American history; that it was, in fact, a great turning point.

One more point before we close. History, as some people like to say, never sits still. In the 1970s, just as the Great Migration peaked at seven million, a new migration began: African Americans began moving back to the South,

and this is referred to as “The New Great Migration.” It’s the product of the successes of the Civil Rights movement and the rapid economic development in what we call the “Sun Belt.”

That does it for the Great Migration. In our next lecture, we’ll explore the story of one of the great chance turning points in American history: the assassination of President McKinley that put Theodore Roosevelt in the White House. Until then, take care.

1901 That Damned Cowboy! Theodore Roosevelt

Lecture 30

Theodore Roosevelt left his mark on the American presidency in two fundamental ways. First, he brought youthful, energetic vigor to an office that had long been the domain of drab, uninspiring, and often forgettable men. Second, he brought the ideals of the emerging Progressive movement to the White House. Unlike his predecessors, Roosevelt was convinced that government not only could help the general public but that it had a moral obligation to do so.

The Gilded Age was an era of dualities, marked by spectacular advances in industrial output and technological innovation but also the darker consequences of industrialization. One problem with this incredible economic growth was that it produced large and powerful corporations, each dominating one sector of the economy. The Captains of Industry or Robber Barons seemed to operate above the law, seeing to it that legislators either made laws they approved of or voted down laws they did not like.

Americans in the Gilded Age worried about the growing gap between the rich and poor. Millions of Americans lived in crowded, squalorous slums in dingy tenements, many of them without running water. They also worried about the frequent episodes of labor-capital conflict: The decades between 1880 and 1900 saw about 37,000 strikes involving 6 million workers, plus an 1892 farmer revolt known as the Populist Revolt.

Many Americans came to believe the only remedy to these problems was for the government to take a greater role in regulating the economy. But others, especially the wealthy and connected, celebrated laissez-faire individualism and condemned any suggestion that the government regulate the economy.

As the conservative Republican president William McKinley settled in for his second term, the prospects for social reform seemed dim. But then a strange twist of fate intervened. McKinley was assassinated, putting Vice President Theodore Roosevelt in the White House.

Roosevelt was born into an old, wealthy New York City family. He graduated from Harvard, studied law at Columbia, and in 1881 won election to the New York State Assembly, where he immediately distinguished himself as a reformer dedicated to rooting out corruption in politics.

After building up an impressive political resume as commissioner of the New York City Police Department, assistant secretary of the navy, and governor of New York, Roosevelt seemed destined for the White House. But the leaders of the Republican Party disliked his independence and therefore nominated him as McKinley's vice president; in those days everyone knew the vice presidency was a dead-end job that rarely led to the White House.

Roosevelt ... lent crucial legitimacy to the many, many other reform movements of the era.

When Republican Party leader Mark Hanna learned of McKinley's death, he exclaimed in dismay, "Now that damned cowboy is president!"

Roosevelt undertook many reforms in his two presidential terms during what came to be called the Progressive era. He did not single-handedly launch

the many reforms, although pushed the federal government to bring about unprecedented and substantive reforms in economic policy, labor relations, consumer protection, and conservation. He also lent crucial legitimacy to the many, many other reform movements of the era.

One of the most enduring images of President Roosevelt is as a trust buster. Roosevelt used his authority to rein in the power of large corporations like no president before him. His administration filed 44 suits against trusts and helped settle a dispute between the major coal mining companies and the United Mine Workers labor union in a way favorable to both. He also created the Department of Commerce and Labor.

In addition to the Meat Inspection Act of 1906, Roosevelt signed into law the Pure Food and Drug Act, taking aim at countless quack medicines, legitimizing the idea that laissez-faire had its merits, but also its limits.

Many consider conservation Roosevelt's greatest Progressive achievement. He established the United States Forest Service, created 5 national parks, 18 national monuments, 51 bird reserves, 4 game preserves, and 150 national forests. In all, he set aside more than 230 million acres American wilderness for preservation.

By the time the Progressive era ended about 1920, President Woodrow Wilson and reformers in Congress had added three important amendments to the Constitution: The Sixteenth Amendment established the graduated income tax; the Seventeenth Amendment required Senators to be elected by popular vote; and the the Nineteenth Amendment granted women the right to vote. All of this was possible because Roosevelt brought Progressive reform into the national spotlight. ■

Suggested Reading

Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*.

McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*.

Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did so many Americans of all classes fear the rising power of big business in the late 19th century?
2. What were the guiding philosophical principles behind the Progressive movement?

1901 That Damned Cowboy! Theodore Roosevelt

Lecture 30—Transcript

Hello. Good to see you again. Today we take a look at a turning point in American history brought about not by a war, not by an invention, not by an election; this turning point came by way of an assassin's bullet.

But before we go into the details, let's start with a story: In 1906, the book *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair shocked the nation. Sinclair, who was a reformer and a socialist, had written an expose of the meatpacking industry centered in Chicago; and through the fictional character Jurgis Rudkis, an immigrant from Lithuania, Sinclair spun a gripping, sickening tale of a greedy industry that exploited its workers and sold diseased and spoiled meat to an unsuspecting public. Let's listen to a typical passage from this landmark book:

Rats were nuisances, and the [meat]packers would put poisoned bread out for them; they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together. This is no fairy story and no joke; the meat would be shoveled into carts, and the man who did the shoveling would not trouble to lift out a rat even when he saw one—these were things that went into the sausage.

Pretty terrible stuff. *The Jungle* became a bestseller and it caused public outrage, and immediately meat sales in America just plummeted. But the meatpacking industry said Upton Sinclair was a liar and they resisted federal inspection, any mention of it. One senator from Indiana who had tried repeatedly for years to pass meat inspection laws decided, "Why not, I'll send a copy to President Theodore Roosevelt"; and Roosevelt later told the story in his typical sort of over-the-top manner. According to Roosevelt, he was reading *The Jungle* at the breakfast table, and he became so revolted by what he read that he jumped to his feet and hurled his plate of sausages out the window (very Roosevelt-ian). Then, he ordered an investigation of the meat industry that led to a report that just was scathing in its indictment of horrible health violations. When Congress, who was given this report, continued to stall in any kind of reform legislation, President Roosevelt released it to the public, and the ensuing public outrage finally forced Congress to pass the

Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act. President Roosevelt signed both these laws on June 30, 1906. It was the Progressive Era. Reform was in the air, and Theodore Roosevelt was in the White House.

Before we delve into how Teddy Roosevelt made it to the White House and his subsequent impact on American history, let's establish our objectives for this lecture. We'll focus primarily on four things: First, we'll look at the state of the nation in the decades leading up to Roosevelt's presidency. Then, we'll examine the assassination of President William McKinley, the key event that put Vice President Theodore Roosevelt in the White House. Then we'll backtrack a bit to see where this most extraordinary American named Theodore Roosevelt came from; how does he become Vice President in the first place? Finally, we'll examine the key reform initiatives undertaken by Roosevelt in what came to be known as the "Progressive Era."

OK, let's begin by taking a hard look at the state of the nation in the decades leading up to President Roosevelt's presidency. In the three decades leading up to 1901, we know this age as the Gilded Age; and the Gilded Age was an era of dualities. As the name suggests, many people considered it to be a golden age, one that was marked by spectacular advances in industrial output and technological innovation; things that transformed the United States from a predominantly agricultural nation early in the 19th century—one that was way behind England, France, and Germany—to the world's foremost industrial power by 1900. Americans in this period celebrated one astonishing achievement after another, from the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, to the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883; from the laying of the Atlantic Cable that connected London to New York by telegraph in 1866, to the unveiling of the Statue of Liberty in 1886. On these occasions, and pretty much any time they had the chance, Americans invoked optimistic themes of progress, expansion, growth, and success. Let's listen to what President Grover Cleveland said in an address in 1893 that sort of captured this spirit:

[E]very American citizen must contemplate with the utmost pride and enthusiasm the growth and expansion of our country the wonderful thrift and enterprise of our people, and the demonstrated superiority of our free government.

You get the idea: It's an enthusiastic era.

Nowhere was this upbeat spirit more evident than at the world's fairs that were held in Philadelphia in 1876 and in Chicago in 1893. These were events that afforded an incredible opportunity to showcase the wonders of American technological genius. Yet, in both instances the year following these world's fairs witnessed massive railroad strikes—the Great Uprising of 1877 and the Pullman Strike of 1894—and these offered vivid evidence that there was more to this upbeat vision of national development than initially met the eye. Put another way, the name “Gilded Age” also suggested a disturbing superficiality to all of this evidence of progress; and this is why the word “gilded” is kind of an interesting metaphor and a very helpful one. A gilded piece of jewelry looks like gold, but if you just scratch it just below the surface you come up with a cheap, hard piece of metal that's obviously worth a lot less. That's why people invoked this metaphor for this era: lots of pizzazz on the surface, but some deep problems beneath that surface; darker things related to industrialization. This worried Americans.

First on the list of worries, to get specific, was the immense power of big business. Industrialization, as we know from our earlier lecture about Samuel Slater, began in the late 1700s and became a really important part of the American economy by the 1830s and 1840s. But industrialization really exploded after the Civil War. Just consider some of these statistics: In 1860 there were 140,000 factories in America. That number jumped in 40 years to over 500,000. The value of production—the value of factory production from these factories—went from 1.9 billion in 1860 to 13 billion in 1900; that's almost a 600 percent increase in factory output. Then, looking at patents, which is a great way to measure innovation: We issued 4,500 patents in 1860 and in 1900 95,000; that's a 2,000 percent increase.

The one troubling aspect of this incredible economic growth was the fact that it produced large and powerful corporations that dominated their sector of the economy. John D. Rockefeller, for example dominated oil refining; Andrew Carnegie dominated steel; Cornelius Vanderbilt dominated the railroads; the list goes on and on. These men—they liked to call themselves “Captains of Industry”; of course, their critics liked to call them “Robber Barons”—seemed to operate above the law. In fact, it appeared to many

people that they had so much wealth that they could control the law; they could use bribery or campaign contributions to see to it that legislators either passed laws they liked (like higher tariffs) or that they would vote down laws they didn't like (like higher taxes). More than a few Americans in this period wondered if unregulated big business posed a threat to the future of American democracy. Big businessmen were more powerful than senators, more powerful than the president; and they were unelected, therefore beyond the control of the people. This theme is vividly displayed in a lot of the great political cartoons of this era; it's one of the great eras in American history for political cartoons. One of my favorites is called "The Bosses of the Senate" and it shows the chamber of the United States Senate with a bunch of men around their desks, but looming above them behind are giant corporations in the form of men who were in the shape of moneybags. If you look closely at the cartoon, in the distance is a doorway that says "The People's Entrance" and it's closed; it's actually barred shut. The monopolists are coming in through "The Monopolists' Entrance" and the caption on the wall says, "This is the Senate of the monopolies, by the monopolies, for the monopolies." You get the idea.

Americans were alarmed not only about the power of big businessmen but also the arrogance that these people expressed; they seemed to be not only beyond the law but beyond the normal boundaries of good behavior. John D. Rockefeller was asked about how he felt about the way the public was viewing his domination of the oil industry and he said, "The public be damned!" When Cornelius Vanderbilt, who dominated railroads, was asked a similar question about the legality of what he was doing he said, "Law! What do I care about the law? Ain't I got the power?" And then my personal favorite by Jay Gould, who was a big Wall Street guy in telegraphs and investing in railroads, when asked if he was worried about labor union activity on his railroads he said, "I could pay one half the working class to kill the other half"; I mean, that is a definition of arrogance if there ever was one.

In addition to worrying about the power, the poor behavior, and the ill-mannered statements of these robber barons, Americans in the Gilded Age were worried about the growing gap between the rich and poor. Anybody who lived in an American city in the late 19th century did not have to look

very far to find gripping scenes of extreme poverty. Millions of Americans in this period lived in crowded, squalorous slums in dingy tenements, many of them without any running water. These images of poverty were backed up by statistics: In 1890, evidence shows that the top 1 percent of the population owned 51 percent of all wealth; that's 1 percent of the population owning more than half the nation's wealth. In contrast, the lower 44 percent of population owned just 1.2 percent; this growing gap between haves and have-nots. These extremes worried Americans for lots of reasons, but one of the biggest was the fear that the American republic was becoming more European.

What do I mean about "becoming more European?" It has nothing to do with ethnicity; it has everything to do with how Americans perceived themselves politically and socially. It's a statement about national identity. As we know, national identities, or even personal identities, usually have two sides: You know what you think you are and in contrast you know what you are not. Americans, for example, in the 20th century understood themselves to be freedom-loving capitalists; that's what we were, that's what we are. In the 20th century, we knew that the opposite of that was Communism; so we were freedom-loving capitalists but we were not Communists. In the 19th century, most Americans understood that they were not European. They knew they're ethnically European, most of them; but what they meant by this was they were not people who lived in a world of monarchs, established churches, fixed classes, and great extremes between the rich and poor. That's what it means to be "not European." But in the Gilded Age, with the growth of poverty and social unrest, it seemed to suggest to a lot of people that America was starting to resemble Europe; was starting to sort of slide towards a European lifestyle. This was an alarming development; Americans, again, prided themselves on not being European. This had gone back all the way to the American Revolution. Let's take a moment to listen to the words of a writer in a newspaper called the *Boston Pilot*; this is from 1878: "What is the good of having a republic unless the mass of the people are better off than in a monarchy? Does not a real republic mean that all men have an equal chance and not millions born to suffering and poverty?" You get the idea: People were concerned.

A third source of anxiety in the Gilded Age was the ever-growing numbers of conflict between labor and capital. In the decades between 1880 and 1900—just 20 years—there were 37,000 strikes in America, and this involved six million American workers. These were not only a lot of strikes; some of them were some of the biggest strikes in American history: the Great Uprising in 1877, the Homestead Strike in 1892, and the Pullman Strike in 1894. A tremendous growth of social unrest; and this really played into this notion that Americans were becoming more European where there was lots of social upheaval. People said if this was the trend of the future we're in trouble. Walt Whitman actually expressed this very vividly; Walt Whitman's an aged man at this point, the great writer. In 1879 he said: If this is going to happen, then "our republican experiment, notwithstanding all its surface-successes, is at heart an unhealthy failure." Walt Whitman was hardly a lone voice of concern, for the Gilded Age produced lots of anxious commentary on this theme of a republic in danger of destruction due to gross inequalities in wealth.

A great example of this concern came from the Populists in 1892. They wrote: "The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind; and the possessors of those, in turn, despise the republic and endanger liberty." Many Americans came to believe that the only remedy to these problems was for the government to take a greater role in regulating the economy. But others, especially the wealthy and those connected with big business, celebrated laissez-faire individualism and they condemned any suggestion that the government might regulate the economy; and they made sure that when Congress began debate over Senator Sherman's bill to curb the size and power of corporations—the Sherman Anti-Trust Act—they made sure that it was so watered down so much that when it finally passed in 1890 it had almost no impact on the size and power of corporations.

For those who supported reform, there were a few signs of hope that emerged in the 1890s. The People's Party came into prominence in the 1890s; we just mentioned them. They were a coalition of farmers, workers, and reform-minded Americans that formed a third party dedicated to corporate regulation and a whole wide range of reforms; but they eventually faded from the scene. In 1896, the Populist reformer William Jennings Bryan ran for President as

the candidate of the Democratic Party. He lost to William McKinley, who became President—the Republican candidate—and McKinley, like most Republicans, was staunchly pro-business and did not have any time for reformers. McKinley and Bryan squared off again in 1900 and McKinley again won; so it looked like the Republicans were going to stay in power and reform was going to be left out in the cold.

As McKinley settled in for a second term, the prospects for social reform absolutely seemed pretty remote. Then, of course, a strange twist of fate occurred, and that was the one that put Theodore Roosevelt in the White House. In September, 1901, President McKinley headed for the Pan-American Exhibition, another one of these world's fairs, this one being held up in Buffalo, New York. On September 5, the President gave a speech, and then the next day he toured Niagara Falls and some of the exhibits at the far, and a public reception was planned for later that afternoon. McKinley's secretary expressed a little bit of concern; this was a big event, lots of people around, and said maybe this might be a little bit dangerous. McKinley just dismissed his worries; he said, "Why should I worry? No one would want to hurt me." So McKinley went to the Temple of Music, this great big building, and met a huge line of people. He was flanked by secret servicemen and members of his staff; he shook hands with all kinds of people passing in a long line; but McKinley and his men did not know that there was a disaffected and probably mentally ill anarchist named Leon Czolgosz. This guy had concealed a gun in his hand, wrapped it under a white handkerchief, and shot McKinley twice when he approached him. McKinley received immediate medical attention and initially it appeared that he was going to recover from his wounds; but he soon took a turn for the worse.

On September 13, seven days after the shooting, Vice President Teddy Roosevelt was out with friends climbing Mount Marcy, way up in upstate New York. At about 1:30 that afternoon, as they were finishing their lunch near the summit, a park ranger arrived bearing a telegram. As soon as he saw it, Roosevelt knew the news was bad. The telegram said that McKinley's condition had gotten worse and that they feared that he might be dying, and that Roosevelt should get to Buffalo as soon as possible. Roosevelt and his staff began to get down the mountain as quickly as possible and get to Buffalo by any means necessary. At 5:30 a.m. on September 14 he reached North

Creek, New York where he got another telegram, this one from Secretary of State John Hay, who said, “The President died at 2:15 this morning.” Ten hours later, Theodore Roosevelt took the oath of office as the 26th President of the United States.

Who was Theodore Roosevelt? Of course, we already know one chapter of Theodore Roosevelt’s remarkable career: his Rough Rider exploits in Cuba during the Spanish American War. But let’s backtrack a little bit to learn a little bit more about this remarkable individual. Roosevelt was born into an old wealthy family in New York City in 1858. He graduated from Harvard, he studied law at Columbia, and in 1881 he won election to the New York State Assembly. Roosevelt very quickly distinguished himself as a reformer who was dedicated to rooting out corruption; and even though he was rich, he took a great interest in the plight of the poor. In this period, Roosevelt gained a lot of publicity; the press loved him because he was so exuberant and they loved to draw cartoons of him, he was just kind of an over the top guy. However, the Republican Party machine in the state of New York did not really like Roosevelt because even though he was a Republican, he was far too independent for their liking. He refused to take orders and he would vote the way his conscience told him to vote, which they wouldn’t like. In 1889, Roosevelt became a member of the United States Civil Service Commission. A few years later, he became one of the commissioners of the police department in New York where he made national headlines by battling police corruption. Two years later, President McKinley named him Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and that’s where he was when he resigned to go form the Rough Riders and find glory and fame in Cuba. When he returned to the United States, Roosevelt, with all this fame and glory behind him, became Governor of the state of New York.

His fame and popularity by this point had many people predicting that he was an absolute shoe-in for the Republican presidential nomination—one of them anyway—in the near future; he’s a fairly young guy at this point. But leaders in the national Republican Party, like those in New York State, did not like Roosevelt. He was way too independent for their liking; what we would probably call a “maverick” in our time, “political maverick.” He would choose to support or oppose legislation on its merits, not on what the party leadership told him to do. Then, as the election of 1900 loomed,

Republican leaders hatched what they thought was an ingenious, clever plan: They would make Roosevelt the vice presidential nominee with McKinley. McKinley would benefit from Roosevelt's fame, and even better, Roosevelt would become vice president and everybody knew that was a dead end job; it would just derail his career forever, they'd never have to worry about Theodore Roosevelt. Most vice presidents never make it to the White House. But these carefully laid plans were upset by the assassin Leon Czolgosz; and when the Republican Party leader Mark Hanna—one of the guys who had hatched this plan—learned of McKinley's death, he exclaimed in dismay: "and now that damned cowboy is President!" That "damned cowboy" was Theodore Roosevelt. As it turned out, Mark Hanna and the other Republican leaders would have to deal with this unpredictable, reform-minded President for nearly eight years.

OK, now that we have finally put Theodore Roosevelt in the White House, let's examine the key reform initiatives he undertook as part of what became known as the "Progressive Era." The most immediate impact of T.R. was the way he changed the image of the American presidency. At 43, he was the youngest man ever to hold the office; and he was also very likely the most energetic and excitable man ever to sit in the Oval Office. Unlike the parade of tired old men who preceded him in the White House, Roosevelt had a perpetual smile and he loved to shout, "Bully!" when he liked something; that was his sort of shorthand way of saying, "I like it!" The Roosevelts were also the first family since the Lincolns to occupy the White House with lots of little children in tow; and Teddy Roosevelt was essentially a little boy at heart, so he let the kids have the run of the place. They brought in a whole menagerie of animals; they shot spit balls at priceless paintings; they slid down banisters; at one point they cut a baseball diamond in the White House lawn; they terrorized the Secret Service with water balloons; occasionally visiting dignitaries would find the President rolling on the ground wrestling with his boys. The press loved it; the American public loved it.

Roosevelt also brought a more expansive vision of the presidency. When necessary, he believed, the President should use his unparalleled position to advance important causes, and T.R. called this speaking from the "bully pulpit," and that's where we get that phrase from. But Roosevelt's greatest accomplishments were in the realm of social reform. It's important

to point out: He did not singlehandedly launch the many reforms that we associate with the Progressive Era; in fact, many of these social reforms like settlement houses, tenement housing reform, and civil service were well underway in the 1890s. The significance of Teddy Roosevelt's presidency was twofold: First, Roosevelt pushed the federal government to bring about unprecedented and substantive reforms in the areas of economic policy, labor relations, consumer protection, and conservation. Second, in so doing, Teddy Roosevelt lent crucial legitimacy to many, many other reform movements taking place far, far away from Washington, D.C. throughout the Progressive Era, and these things carried on way past his presidency.

Let's take a look at how this played out. First and foremost, let's talk about "trust busting." One of the most enduring images of Roosevelt is that he was a "trust buster." This name somewhat exaggerates Roosevelt's approach to corporate regulation, but it's still accurate because Roosevelt did use the federal government's authority to rein in the power of large corporations like no other president before him. In 1902, less than a year after he took office, T. R. instructed the Justice Department to begin prosecuting large corporations suspected of engaging in illegal practices. Let's listen to what Roosevelt had to say on this matter:

The great corporations which we have grown to speak of rather loosely as trusts are the creatures of the State, and the State not only has the right to control them, but it is duty bound to control them wherever the need of such control is shown.

Corporations need to be controlled by the state on some level.

Over the next seven years, Roosevelt's administration would file 44 suits against trusts, including J. P. Morgan's Northern Securities Company, John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil, and James B. Duke's tobacco trust. T.R. was not opposed to all trusts, to all big business, per se; in fact, let's listen to what he had to say on this matter because it's important. He's a trust buster, but only in certain circumstances:

Our aim is not to do away with corporations; on the contrary, these big aggregations are an inevitable development of modern

industrialism ... we are not attacking the corporations, but endeavoring to do away with any evil in them. We are not hostile to them; we are merely determined that they shall be so handled as to subserve the public good.

We like corporations, but we will make sure that they do not misbehave, essentially. Roosevelt did try to rein in the largest corporations, but only those that were engaged in bad practices, like monopolistic practices.

Let's look at another element of reform: the rights of labor. That same year, 1902, Roosevelt turned his attention to a dispute between the major coal mining companies and the United Mine Workers labor union. On May 12 of that year, 100,000 coal miners in the UMW walked off the job when the coal companies refused to negotiate a new contract for higher wages, shorter hours, and union recognition. This strike was no small matter because the nation literally ran on coal. In those days, the advantage in labor conflicts always resided with the employers; they had deep pockets while workers basically usually had nothing but a little bit of personal savings and almost no strike funds. Businessmen always rely also on the local, state, and federal officials to side with them in labor conflicts. In fact, the history of American labor conflict in the 19th century is filled with incidents involving the local police, state militia, and federal soldiers breaking strikes, in some cases very violently. American presidents rarely got involved in strikes, but when they did it was always on the side of capital. In 1834, for example, Andrew Jackson sent in the army to break up a strike on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. Lincoln had his employees in the War Department run the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad during the Civil War. In 1877, Rutherford B. Hayes sent in troops to put down the national railroad strike; and President Cleveland did the same thing in 1894. So what would Roosevelt do?

In 1902, as we mentioned, the nation literally ran on coal, so Roosevelt could easily justify intervention on behalf of the mining companies in the name of national security. But Roosevelt was also a progressive and he sincerely believed in what he liked to call "fair play"; the idea that labor and capital should work together to reach a mutually acceptable accommodation. In a very typical Roosevelt manner, he ordered both sides to report to the White House; and they had a lengthy and sometimes hostile series of negotiations,

but Roosevelt ended up brokering a deal. The miners compromised; they won a 10 percent pay raise and a nine-hour work day (they had wanted 20 percent and an eight-hour day). The mine owners agreed to these terms, but they got a bit of a victory, too: They did not have to recognize the UMW as the official union of these workers. So both sides got a little something. They also agreed to settle future disputes by submitting them to an arbitration board. Roosevelt followed this unprecedented action by creating a new cabinet department, the Department of Commerce and Labor, which for the first time made keeping peace between labor and capital a federal priority.

Let's look at a third element of Roosevelt's reform agenda: consumer protection. We already know from our discussion at the beginning of this lecture about Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, that Roosevelt signed legislation to create better inspection of the meat packing industry. But he also signed into law the Pure Food and Drug Act, and this latter law took aim at outlawing the countless quack medicines that not only failed to cure any ailments but actually often caused additional medical problems for the people that were sick. Here we see the legitimization of a really important idea: Laissez-faire, the policy of leaving business alone to run itself without any government regulation, had its merits, but it also had its limits. Progressives like Roosevelt were establishing a principle that eventually most Americans would come to accept: that it's the responsibility of the government to maintain at least some minimal standards of safety for the unsuspecting public.

Another dimension of Roosevelt's reform agenda was conservation. Let's look at this reform in more detail; what some people consider to be Roosevelt's most outstanding achievement and longest lasting achievement. If you know anything about Theodore Roosevelt you know he was an avid outdoorsman, and he really was the nation's first environmentalist president. He established the United States Forest Service; he signed laws creating five national parks and 18 national monuments; he also established the first 51 bird reserves, four game preserves, and 150 national forests; you get the idea. In all, 230 million acres of land were set aside by Roosevelt, preventing it from ever being ruined by any kind of development. Let's listen to Roosevelt's justification for this, because it rings familiar in our day; it gives you a sense of how Roosevelt was way ahead of his time:

To waste, to destroy, our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed.

We can't exploit nature without thinking ahead to the consequences for future generations.

These four major reforms initiated by Roosevelt legitimized a wide range of other reforms taking place on the state and city level. For example, by 1920, many states had adopted civil service exams, the initiative and referendum, and laws prohibiting child labor and mandating workmen's compensation. On the federal level, Congress also passed three key amendments to the Constitution.

As I stated at the outset, the wave of reforms adopted during the Progressive Era did not start with Theodore Roosevelt, and it extended way past his presidency. But it was Roosevelt's accidental ascension to the presidency in 1901 that brought progressive reform into the national spotlight, marking a key turning point in American history. Thank you.

1903 The Second Transportation Revolution

Lecture 31

The founding of the Ford Motor Company in 1903 transformed automobiles from the playthings of tinkerers and the rich into a central fixture in American life. The subsequent automobile revolution created one of the largest businesses in America, led to a massive road and highway building program, and sparked movement from cities to suburbs. The year 1903 also saw the birth of aviation, which took hold slowly but eventually created a “smaller” world.

The first automobiles were designed in Europe with steam-powered engines and top speeds of only 15 miles per hour. Gottlieb Daimler invented an internal combustion engine; by 1889, he and other inventors, such as Karl Benz, were building workable gasoline-powered motor cars. In 1893, Frank and Charles Duryea of Massachusetts built the first successful gasoline-powered automobile in America.

Henry Ford was a machinist and mechanical engineer who built his first so-called gas buggy in 1892 and founded the Ford Motor Company in 1903. His revolutionary idea was not to build expensive cars for the rich but dependable, affordable cars for the masses. Ford introduced the Model T in 1908. This 4-cylinder, 20-horsepower car cost \$825 and featured a number of design innovations that made it an instant hit.

Ford plowed a significant percentage of his profits into developing mass production techniques. This involved new equipment and machines but also new ways of organizing a shop floor. In 1913, Ford made industrial history by establishing the moving assembly line, eventually cutting the time to make a Model T from 12.5 to 1.5 hours.

Not surprisingly, Ford's rivals copied his techniques—boosting their output and lowering their costs. By 1920 there were 8 million vehicles on American roads. Meanwhile, small-time automakers went out of business, and by 1929, the market was dominated by the three biggest companies: Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler.

One of the great capitalist innovations attributed to the rise of the automobile was consumer credit. By 1925, about 75 percent of new car purchases were done on credit, and from this point forward, consumer debt was a standard feature of middle-class life in America. Three other innovations started with automobiles and spread to the rest of American industry: planned obsolescence, annual styling innovations, and offering a wide range of products that appealed to consumers in different income brackets.

The success of the car had what economists call a multiplier effect: The flourishing of one industry stimulates a boom in related industries—in this case, steel, glass, rubber, and petroleum; filling stations; auto dealerships; and repair shops. It likewise triggered a massive road-building effort.

The year 1903 also marked the beginning of modern aviation with Orville and Wilbur Wright's first flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The first human flight occurred in 1783 when two Frenchmen traveled about 5.5 miles in 20 minutes in a hot air balloon. By the mid-19th century, several



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The automobile quickly transformed from status symbol to middle-class necessity, thanks to myriad government policies encouraging its use.

Europeans had begun experimenting with gliders, and by 1890, countless tinkerers were inching toward heavier-than-air human flight.

The Wright brothers were Ohio bicycle repairmen and inventors who used the profits from their business to fund their experiments in flight, focusing on most difficult area: control. Between 1899 and 1903, they built and tested several gliders at Kitty Hawk. Then, on December 17, 1903, at about 10:35 a.m., Orville Wright took off in a manned airplane, flew for 12 seconds, and covered 120 feet.

Few people took notice of the first flight. The Wright brothers were poor publicists, and newspaper editors had heard many false claims already. When the public finally took notice, the Wright brothers ceased flying, fearing their competitors would steal their ideas. The Wright brothers were never successful airplane manufacturers, despite their head start. Wilber died of typhoid fever in 1912, and Orville sold the company in 1915.

Unlike the automobile industry, the aviation industry developed slowly. The birth of the industry as we know it came after World War II, thanks to American prosperity and technological advances that made air travel increasingly safe and comfortable. In 1958, the Boeing 707—the first jet airliner—was introduced, and the jet age was born.

The second transportation revolution perpetuated a feature of American life that dates back to the earliest colonial days: mobility. Both airlines and automobiles have become multi-billion-dollar industries that directly and indirectly employ millions. The automobile has served as a symbol of freedom and a signifier of social and economic status in American society since its introduction. But we should acknowledge that the automobile and jet airliner also raise questions about our impact on the environment. ■

The success of the car had what economists call a multiplier effect: The flourishing of one industry stimulates a boom in related industries.

Suggested Reading

Brinkley, *Wheels for the World*.

Crouch, *The Bishop's Boys*.

Kay, *Asphalt Nation*.

Kimes, *Pioneers, Engineers, and Scoundrels*.

Tobin, *To Conquer the Air*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why are Americans by nature the most mobile people in the world?
2. How did the automobile change American culture?

1903 The Second Transportation Revolution

Lecture 31—Transcript

Welcome back. It's time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Today, we look at the Second Transportation Revolution; specifically, the invention of the airplane and the automobile.

Let's start by considering one of my favorite anecdotes about the automobile. In 1940, the great director John Ford released the film "The Grapes of Wrath." It was a film based on John Steinbeck's bestselling and Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of the same name. The film depicted the struggles of the Joads, a poor family from Oklahoma trying to get to California in search of work and opportunity. The film is dark and it's filled with the despair of America during the Great Depression. Officials in the Soviet Union in 1940, always on the lookout for ways to show the capitalist West in a bad light, somehow obtained a copy of the film and began showing it in public theaters. They hoped it would portray American capitalism as a broken and cruel system. Instead, Soviet moviegoers left theaters with a very different message: In America, even the poor have cars. When Soviet officials learned of this unintended reaction, they pulled the movie from the theaters.

Before we go any further into this intriguing story of the invention of the automobile and the airplane, the Second Transportation Revolution, let's set our objectives for this lecture. We'll focus on four things: First, we'll look at the origins of the airplane and the automobile. Next, we'll examine how the automobile grew in popularity and use in the early 20th century. Then, we'll explore the same story as it applied to the airplane. Finally, we'll examine the wider impact of these two inventions on American life since 1903.

Ok, let's start by looking at the origins of the automobile. The first automobiles were designed in Europe. The original versions featured steam-powered engines that reached top speeds of only 15 miles an hour. The key innovation that made the automobile as we know it possible came in 1885 when a German named Gottlieb Daimler invented an internal combustion engine with the intention of using it power a motorcar. Four years later, in 1889, he built the workable automobile; and that same year another German, Karl Benz, also built a workable gasoline-powered motorcar. Across the

Atlantic Ocean in America, many mechanics were hard at work on their own versions.

In 1893, two brothers in Massachusetts built the first successful gasoline-powered automobile in America. Frank and Charles Duryea were bicycle mechanics, and they were among scores of Americans tinkering away in their basements and barns to create a vehicle powered by an engine. Two years later, the Duryea brothers won the first American Automobile Race, a 54-mile race in Illinois that took more than seven hour (that gives you an idea of slow things were and how primitive the technology was). The following year, in 1896, they sold their first car—the first gasoline-powered car sold in America—and they sold a grand total of 13 cars that year. By 1899, some 30 automobile manufacturers produced 2,500 cars. Most of these vehicles were expensive and sold to rich people. Early automobiles were live private jets of today: They were extremely expensive toys for the rich and powerful. In fact, one can see this by looking at newspapers from the early 1900s. These papers are filled with stories of people, usually young boys, hurling rocks at automobilists. Working-class people basically saw cars as offensive forms of conspicuous consumption; and they also resented the noise that cars made and the fact that automobiles seemed to run down people more frequently than did horses or trolleys.

The success enjoyed by these early automobile companies inspired more would-be entrepreneurs to enter the business: 485 manufactures went into business between 1900 and 1910. One of them was a man named Ransom E. Olds, and in 1901 he introduced the first commercially successful automobile in America. The Oldsmobile was really just a motorized horse buggy. It featured a tiny little engine of just three horsepower and the steering was done by a tiller, just like in a boat. But the Oldsmobile was affordable at \$650, and in 1904 Olds sold more than 5,500 of them.

Another of these early auto manufacturers was a young man named Henry Ford. Henry Ford was born in Michigan in 1863. His father was an immigrant from County Cork, Ireland; he had fled to America during the Great Famine of the 1840s, and the Ford family scratched out a living on a small farm. Young Henry Ford grew up hating farm work and at age 16 he left home and he walked to Detroit and it was there that he found a job as a

machinist's apprentice and eventually became a full-fledged machinist. In 1890, Henry Ford was hired as a mechanical engineer at the Detroit Edison Illuminating Company. For years he spent his spare time at night and on weekends working to design and build a workable automobile. In 1892, he succeeded in building a gas buggy that he drove around the streets of Detroit. Four years later, the young inventor met Thomas Edison himself, and Edison said to him, "Keep on with your engine, I can see a great future." Ford soon decided to give up his high-paying job at Edison and to go into the automobile manufacturing business full time.

After two false starts, he formed the Ford Motor Company in 1903; and to give you an idea of the competitive and wide-open nature of the industry at this point, that same year 57 other car companies were founded and 27 others went bankrupt. Henry Ford's aim was not to build expensive cars for "fat cats" but good, dependable, and affordable cars for the masses; and this was his revolutionary idea. In 1904, his first full year of operation, he sold 1,745 cars; so he's enjoying some success. Two years later, Henry Ford introduced the four-cylinder, 15-horsepower Model M and it sold for \$600; it was a huge success. By 1908, Ford sold 9,000 cars and took in an income of \$6 million for his company. But he wasn't satisfied; he was still determined to build a "car for the multitudes," he liked to say. That same year, Ford introduced the Model T. this was a four-cylinder, 20-horsepower car that cost \$825 and it featured all kinds of design innovations that made it an instant hit. For example, the Model T—or what some people would eventually start calling the "Tin Lizzie"—was lighter and stronger than rival cars because it used what was called "vanadium steel," basically a stronger and lighter form of steel. The Model T also featured a high chassis, which made it better for handling on rough, rural roads; remember, almost all roads in America were not paved at this point.

Henry Ford, based on this success, plowed a huge amount of his profits right back into his company with an eye towards developing more efficient mass production techniques; and this involved developing new equipment and new machines, but also new ways of organizing a shop floor. In 1909, his company produced 18,000 Model T's; in 1912, 170,000; and in 1913, Henry Ford made industrial history by establishing the moving assembly line to make his Model T's. There were precedents for this kind of moving

assembly line, especially in the meatpacking industry, but Ford took it to a new level and the results were simply astonishing. Before the assembly line, it took Ford's workers 12 ½ hours to complete a new car. With the new assembly line, it cut this process down to just 2 hours and 40 minutes; and by 1920, Ford workers were completing cars in just 93 minutes. That same year, production topped one million cars for the first time. It was all about efficiency and cost-cutting, and this spirit was captured in Henry Ford's famous claim, "Any consumer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black."

The speed and efficiency of this new assembly process turned the automobile from a luxury good enjoyed only by the super-rich into a necessity within the grasp of the middle class. In 1912, the Model T cost \$575; in 1916, the price dropped to \$345; by 1927, even when factoring in inflation, the cost dropped to just \$290. I can't resist pointing out here one of the more ironic aspects of the story of the advent of the automobile. As use of the automobile spread, many people living in cities celebrated the car as a "nonpolluting" form of transportation. "Nonpolluting," you might ask? Well, yes: When you consider what tens of thousands of horses did to city streets every day, the automobile sure seemed like clean technology; believe me, very clean technology. It's only in the 1950s, when a critical mass of cars were on the road, that people began to notice something called "smog"; and then at that point people realized, "Oh, yes, I guess that smoke doesn't disappear; it hangs around, it causes pollution."

Ok, back to Henry Ford: One thing that accounted for his astonishing success was his invention of franchise dealerships spread out across the country; so he had loyal people selling his cars all across the country. Another innovation was his decision to go international. Henry Ford opened his first plant in Canada in 1904, just one year after founding his company. In 1911, he opened plants in England and in France; and in the 20s, in Denmark, Germany, Austria, Argentina, Australia, and South Africa. In 1920, 40 percent of the cars produced in Great Britain were Fords. Not surprisingly, Henry Ford's rivals copied his techniques and thereby boosted their output and lowered their costs. By 1910, there were almost half a million automobiles on the roads of America. In 1913, U.S. auto manufacturers produced 485,000 of the world's 606,000 cars; so America was leading the way in car production and

Henry Ford was leading the way within the United States. By 1920, the total number of vehicles on American roads hit eight million.

As automobile manufacturers invested more and more capital into their manufacturing processes, it became harder and harder for the small-time producers to stay in business. One by one, in classic Darwinian style, small-time automobile manufacturers went out of business; and where there were 253 manufacturers in 1908, there were just 44 in 1929. Of these, the market was dominated to the tune of 80 percent of the market share by the big manufacturers with names that are still familiar today: Ford, GM, and Chrysler. In the Depression-ravaged 1930s, most of these small manufacturers would disappear; by 1940, only 17 automakers remained in America (and, of course, that number was about to shrink, too).

One of the great capitalist innovations attributed to the rise of the automobile was the popularization of consumer credit. In 1916, Ford's rivals first introduced the idea of buying on the installment plan, or as they liked to say in the day, "Buying on time." Henry Ford thought this was a bad idea and he resisted the trend, but eventually he relented in 1927. Buying luxury goods like pianos, sewing machines, and radios on credit had been well-established before the 1920s, but it was in that decade that auto manufacturers convinced Americans to start buying expensive goods on credit. By 1925, about three-quarters of new car purchases were done on credit; and it was from this point forward that consumer debt would become a major feature of middle class life in America.

Three other innovations that started with automobiles and then spread to the rest of American industry were pioneered by Alfred P. Sloan; he's the head of General Motors. First, beginning in the 1920s, he introduced the concept of "planned obsolescence"; that is, building cars in such a way that they become obsolete within 5 or 10 years. Such a system guaranteed, of course, the sale of more cars. So, too, did Sloan's second innovation: annual innovations in styling of his models. While Henry Ford continued to sell the largely-unchanged Model T in the color of black, Sloan's vehicles changed their shape and look every year—in fact, sometimes within a year he'd change it more than once—and you could buy your car in an ever-widening range of colors; so you could get a Ford only in black, but you could get a

GM car in all kinds of different colors. Sloan had basically come to realize that cars were not just utilitarian devices to get people around and move goods around; they were just like any other consumer good in that they reflected the personal tastes and more importantly the self-image and the desires of the consumers who bought them. His plan was to make consumers become dissatisfied with their cars, just like they did with their clothes or their shoes, even when their cars were still in decent shape; he wanted them to get dissatisfied and go out and buy a new automobile. The third innovation of Sloan was he offered a wide range of cars; so not just aiming like Henry Ford did at the low end, but he offered cars in the low-, middle-, and high-income brackets. All three of these innovations by Sloan were soon spread throughout the American automobile industry and then into many, many other products as well.

Ford's success with mass producing the car had an enormous impact. Economists called this the "multiplier effect": The flourishing of one industry stimulates a boom in several related industries. Just to give you a couple of examples: By 1920, automobiles consumed 20 percent of American steel, 75 percent of American plate glass, and 80 percent of rubber. Petroleum companies were especially thrilled by the arrival of the car. They had been rapidly losing their kerosene business with the spread of electric lighting; and remember, all the early oil fortunes were selling kerosene, not gasoline. Ford's revolution spawned dozens of entirely new industries, from filling stations and motels to auto dealerships and repair shops; and it likewise triggered a massive road-building effort that's never stopped. Of course, a few industries were all but wiped out by Ford's innovation, most notably the horse and buggy manufacturers. Another impact: It ended what had been a 5,000-year run for the horse as the main mover of people and goods not only in America but in the world, for in 1929 there were 26.5 million cars on the road; 1 car for every five Americans. Horses were going to disappear from the landscape except on farms.

Ok, now that we've launched the automobile, let's turn to the same story as it applied to the airplane. While 1903 marked the entrance of Henry Ford into an already established automobile industry, it marked just the very beginning of aviation, for this was the year that Orville and Wilbur Wright made history with their first flight. We know that human beings prior to this

point had thought and dreamed about flight for a very, very long time. Many ancient myths, for example, involved humans learning how to fly; the Greek myth about Icarus is a great example. We also know that great thinkers like Leonardo da Vinci created speculative designs for aircraft they thought would someday become a reality. But the first real flight, if we want to call it that, occurred in 1783, and that's when two Frenchmen cast off in a hot air balloon and traveled about five-and-a-half miles in about 25 minutes. For the next century, balloons as well as dirigibles traveled greater and greater distances and with increasing amounts of control. By the mid-19th century, several Europeans had begun experimenting with gliders, essentially a prototype of planes (of course, without any power source). By the 1890s, countless numbers of tinkerers, visionaries, and scientists were inching towards the development of what was called "heavier than air human flight"; that was because the devices they were flying into the air were heavier than air unlike a balloon. When I say "inching towards this goal," I mean inching; progress was very slow and halting, until the arrival of two of the most unlikely technology revolutionaries ever: Wilbur and Orville Wright.

The Wright brothers were born in 1867 and 1871 respectively. They grew up in Dayton, Ohio in the home of their father who was a conservative minister and a newspaper publisher. Neither Wright brother went to college; instead, in 1889, they went into the printing business. Here they began to show unusual skill, innate skills, in engineering and mechanical design; because in addition to executing print orders, they began quickly to design new and improved printing processes. A couple years later, in 1892, they opened a bicycle shop; and again, in addition to selling and repairing bicycles, which were all the rage in the 1890s, the brothers developed improved features and began building bicycles of their own design. Interestingly and rather significantly, it's the profits from these two businesses that they earned that allowed them the luxury of taking time to conduct experiments in flight?

What turned these two Midwestern bicycle shop owners into pioneers in aviation? Both men were avid readers, especially of scientific and technology literature; and in the mid-1890s, they were particularly taken with published reports of experiments in aviation involving balloons, gliders, and dirigibles. At some point, the Wright brothers decided to begin their own experiments. They figured that since others had made great advances in two key elements

of heavier than air flight—wing designs, which had been advanced by people building gilders; and power, the internal combustion engine was readily available—they would focus on the most difficult area: control.

In 1889, they designed and built a large biplane kite that featured a mechanism that allowed them to control its movements. It was called “wing warping,” and like it sounds, it involved the bending of the wings in such a way that it caused the kite to move in a predictable direction. They were thrilled with this initial success, and they moved the next year to the Outer Banks of North Carolina for the summer, where strong and steady winds—and, if need be, soft sand for a sudden landing—made for an excellent aviation laboratory. There, in a place called Kitty Hawk, they conducted experiments with a large, unmanned glider; and with the data that they collected, they spent the next year designing a new and improved glider and went back to North Carolina in 1901 for more tests. This glider performed well but not as well as their calculations suggested it should have, and they were very frustrated with this; so they decided that the calculations they had been relying on—a lot of them done by people who had already done other aviation experiments—were faulty, so they needed to start over from scratch. Incredibly, the Wright brothers just decided right on the spot to build a wind tunnel, and this allowed them to collect enormous amounts of useful data and design new and improved wings.

In 1902, they again returned to North Carolina with a new glider, and this glider now incorporated all this new knowledge that they had collected from the wind tunnel. They conducted more than 700 flights and recorded a top distance of 622.5 feet. They went back to Ohio and that winter they built a plane and an engine—their own internal combustion engine of their own design—and they returned to Kitty Hawk in late 1903. On December 17, 1903, at approximately 10:35 a.m., Orville Wright took off and flew for 12 seconds and covered about 120 feet. They did two more flights that went a greater distance, and then the fourth and final flight that day recorded a whopping 852 feet over a time span of about 59 seconds. Five witnesses were on hand to verify the achievement, including a photographer who snapped the first flight photo, a very famous photograph in American history. The Wright brothers had done it: They had achieved the first powered, sustained, and controlled heavier than air flight in human history.

How long was it before they were honored by a trip to the White House and a tickertape parade in New York City? As it turned out, few people took notice of this first flight. Why is this so? For one thing, the Wright brothers were really bad at publicity, they didn't have that down; and so they didn't get the word out to more than a handful of places. Second, Americans were so used to, over 30 or 40 years or longer, of reading stories of people claiming to have flown a flying machine that they were very, very skeptical; so when there were small announcements about the Wright brothers it didn't really trigger any kind of enthusiasm. The Wright brothers were undaunted, they didn't really care; they poured all their energy into building more planes. By the fall of 1905, they were making sustained flights of 40 minutes and developing greater and greater dexterity and skill in controlling the planes' movements. A few curious reporters, hearing about this, eventually made their way to the cow pasture where they were doing this just outside of Dayton, Ohio, and to watch these test flights. They wrote a few articles and somebody actually even snapped a photograph that made it into the newspapers; but just when the public seemed to be taking notice of the Wright brothers, they abruptly ceased flying.

Why was this so? Why would you stop this and particularly the demonstration of your success? They were afraid that their rivals would steal their ideas before their patents that they had filed had become official. For the next two years as the Wright brothers labored to perfect their planes and not only that but secure contracts with the U.S. Army and anybody else interested in building these planes, several Europeans began to win claims for what amounted to short hops; really sort of pathetic versions of flight compared to what the Wright brothers were doing, but nobody had really seen the Wright brothers so these little hops of a few hundred feet were getting all kinds of press. Worse, the French press ridiculed the Wright brothers' claims to have actually flown a plane. One article in 1906 said, "The Wrights have flown, or they have not flown; they possess a machine, or they do not possess one; they are, in fact, either flyers or liars. It is difficult to fly; it is easy to say 'We have flown.'" That phrase "flyers or liars" must have infuriated the Wright brothers. But in 1908, the Wrights signed a contract with the Army; and that summer Wilbur went to France and he dazzled the French people with a series of spectacular exhibition flights that were not only lengthy but they were also graceful. He did great big figure eights and so forth; people just

couldn't believe what they were seeing. Nobody doubted the Wrights after that; in fact, the people that wrote those nasty things about them all wrote public apologies in the newspapers.

Unfortunately, the rest of the story for the Wrights wasn't, dare I say, uplifting. They incorporated in 1909 and began manufacturing airplanes immediately, and they also opened a flight school. But they soon became consumed with the belief that their rivals, men like the pilot and airplane designer Glenn Curtiss, were stealing their ideas, especially their steering and controlling technology that was really their major achievement. Over the next few years, they filed suit after suit alleging patent infringement; and although they won several of these cases, they never received much in compensation. Then in 1912, Wilbur Wright died of typhoid fever. Three years later, Orville sold their company for \$1.5 million, which was a lot of money in those days but not nearly as much money as he might have made if he had been a successful manufacturer. Orville Wright spent the rest of his life as sort of an elder statesman of aviation. He didn't die penniless like some great inventors, but he also didn't end up building the dominant business in the industry; people like Cyrus McCormick, for example, invented the mechanical reaper and then made a fortune on it or, more recently, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak inventing really the most successful personal computer and then building a multi-billion dollar company on top of that.

Unlike the automobile industry, it would take a long, long time for aviation to develop. World War I gave a big boost to airplane design and construction, and so, too, did the authorization by Congress in 1925 to allow private pilots to carry air mail. Charles Lindbergh's famous transatlantic flight in 1927 stimulated growing interest in passenger travel by air; and by 1929, several small fledgling airlines were founded, including companies that eventually became American Airlines, Delta, Pan-Am, Trans-World, and United Airlines. That year, these and other companies carried 173,405 passengers; so it's growing, but still quite tiny. Air travel grew considerably in the 1930s, even with the Great Depression, as new passenger aircraft like the DC-3 came online. In 1938, one million passengers took to the air. But even at its peak, airline travel in this decade remained really essentially on the fringes of America's transportation network. World War II provided another catalyst for the rapid advances in airplane technology as American factories churned

out more than 300,000 planes for the war effort; and, of course, all along the way they're developing new and better airplane technology. The war also saw the development of key technologies such as radar and eventually jet engines.

The birth of the airline industry as we know it today came after the war and reflected in part the booming prosperity of the post-war period. But it also reflected the great advances in plane design that made air travel increasingly safe and increasingly comfortable. The biggest breakthrough came in 1958 with the introduction of the first jet airliner, the Boeing 707. This was an amazing piece of technology at the time. It could carry 118 passengers and achieve a top speed of 550 miles an hour. The jet age was born. Over the coming decades, air travel became less and less an exotic way to get around and more and more mainstream. By 2010, on an average day about 2 million Americans boarded a passenger airliner; that means an annual total of nearly 800 million passengers. All told, the U.S. accounts for about half the world's passengers.

What does all this add up to? What's the historical significance of this Second Transportation Revolution that began in 1903? For one, it perpetuated a key feature of American life that dates way back to the earliest colonial day: Americans are the most mobile, restless people on earth, and they have been for hundreds of years. There are many social, cultural, and economic reasons for this tradition, but there's also a technological one: Americans have pioneered in the development of cheap and accessible transportation. Put another way: Americans move around a lot because they can. Another significance, of course, is that both the airlines and automobiles have become huge, multibillion dollar industries that employ both directly and indirectly millions of people. Both have also played a central role in the development of a massive tourism industry, both domestic and international; and both industries have gone global, thereby reshaping economic, social, and cultural conditions all around the world. Airlines in particular now play a central role in the unprecedented global migrations of immigrants to the United States and to other countries. The world has become smaller as a result of airline travel.

In terms of exerting a direct and profound impact on modern American life, the automobile ranks right up there with the advent of television and the personal computer, topics we'll talk about in two future lectures. In fact, in a third upcoming lecture, we'll examine the central role of the automobile in the transformation of the United States into the world's first suburban nation. But there are two other additional impacts worth noting: First, since its introduction in the early 20th century, the automobile has served as the most important signifier of social and economic status in American society. It may be true that we are what we eat, but in America, when it comes to status, we are what we drive.

Second, as American life has become more and more private and individualized, the automobile has become an important symbol of freedom for Americans. This idea is not simply a creation of Madison Avenue advertisers, although they certainly emphasize it; it shows up consistently in surveys when Americans are asked to define what freedom means to them. For some, it's the feeling of freedom they get when they are out driving on what, after all, is called a "freeway," listening to their favorite song. For others, it's the feeling that their car has become sort of a sanctuary from their hectic lives; kind of a bubble, if you will. The writer Edward McDonagh put it this way: "The car has become a secular sanctuary for the individual, his shrine to the self, his mobile Walden Pond."

Finally, we should acknowledge one more aspect of this Second Transportation Revolution: both the automobile and the jet airliner raise key questions about the environment. Taken together, cars and jets produce a huge share of greenhouse gases that experts say contribute to climate change. As a result, we may be on the verge of another transportation revolution; one that involves sources of energy that are far less harmful to the environment.

We'll have to leave it there in this discussion of the Second Transportation Revolution. For our next lecture, we'll explore in a very different story the campaign to eradicate the hookworm epidemic in the American South. Thank you.

1909 The Scourge of the South—Hookworm

Lecture 32

One of the greatest public health triumphs in history began in 1909 with the formation of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm. This parasite, affecting as many as one-half to two-thirds of Southerners, caused its human host to move slowly and exhibit sluggishness of mind. The key to the five-year campaign to rid the South of hookworm was the construction of outhouses. Within a decade, the scourge of the South was on its way to eradication.

A rare instance of a disease playing a positive role in history—at least for the United States—was the debilitation of British troops in Virginia by malaria during the Revolution. The American Revolution was won in part by an army of mosquitoes carrying deadly parasites.

Hookworm was another common parasite in the American South. It lives in the small intestine and feeds on blood, causing anemia in the human host. Anemia, in turn, impairs cognitive development and drains a person of energy. Its effects are especially devastating in children as it hinders their mental and physical development. By the early 20th century, as much as 43 percent of the South's population was infected.

Northerners had come to see the South as a backward place of illiteracy, ignorance, and laziness. This stereotype seemed to explain why the South, even decades after the Civil War, lagged far behind the North in economic productivity, household income, literacy, and education.

In 1902, Charles W. Stiles discovered an American hookworm that he suspected was widespread in the South and a leading cause of health problems in the region. He called it *Necator americanus*, meaning “American murderer.” Shortly thereafter, Stiles began his first major investigation into the extent of hookworm infestation in America. He found the most infected people in regions with sandy soil, sometimes in epidemic proportions.

Stiles's discovery made national headlines as the "germ of laziness." He immediately recognized the value of the publicity—even inaccurate and sensational publicity. Many Southerners, including politicians and doctors, resented the notion that the region suffered from laziness and backwardness,

The Rockefeller Sanitary Commission also established traveling dispensaries that borrowed from the practices of traveling evangelical missions and camp meetings.

even if it was due to a disease, so Stiles made little headway with eradication programs until 1909, when he met Frederick Gates, the man in charge of oil magnate John D. Rockefeller's philanthropy efforts.

Rockefeller liked the idea of funding a public health initiative that would remove obstacles to individual achievement.

He gave \$1 million (more than \$20 million in today's money) to establish the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease.

The commission first determined how many people were infected—7.5 million people across 11 states. Then it launched a massive public information campaign to change attitudes and educate people on how to eliminate the problem through public lectures, pamphlets, teacher education, and physician education.

The Rockefeller Sanitary Commission also established traveling dispensaries that borrowed from the practices of traveling evangelical missions and camp meetings. They brought forth cured individuals to testify before the crowds. Their lectures were as lively as revival sermons.

The fourth component of the hookworm eradication campaign was in many ways the most important: the promotion of outhouse construction. Hookworm eggs and larvae live in human waste and make their way into a new host through contact with bare feet. The commission taught individuals how to create a safe privy and convinced state and local authorities to require outhouses for schools and other public facilities.

Many people saw these wide-ranging and high profile efforts by the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission as a yet another demonstration of one of the core values of the Progressive era: that science and expertise, coupled with enlightened government, could solve virtually any social ill. Hookworm remained a huge problem in 1914 when the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission shut down, but the work it began continued as states took on greater responsibility for improving public health. By 1920 hookworm infection had been cut in half, and over the next 20 years it disappeared.

The hookworm eradication story plays an important role in current debates over efforts to eliminate poverty in the developing world. Some international aid agencies argue that priority must be given to economic and legal reform. Others, however, point to the Rockefeller Commission and insist that a more effective approach is to start with eradication of diseases—including hookworm. ■

Suggested Reading

Ettling, *The Germ of Laziness*.

Questions to Consider

1. To what extent did the hookworm epidemic feed anti-Southern prejudice in the North? How has that prejudice endured into the present day?
2. Why are diseases and epidemics often overlooked by historians when seeking to understand a historical event or past society?

1909 The Scourge of the South—Hookworm

Lecture 32—Transcript

Welcome back. Here we go again, back in time to explore a key turning point in American history. Today, we look at a story very few Americans have ever heard about. It's the story of the early-20th century campaign to rid the American South of a debilitating affliction that affected millions: the hookworm parasite.

But let's start with a brief story that looks at a rare instance when a disease played a positive role in American history; a positive role at least for the United States. In 1779, the British launched a campaign into the American South that they hoped would lead to a speedy end to the so-called "American Revolution," as they thought of it. As we noted in our lectures on the 1770s, the British at that time possessed the world's mightiest army and navy. The Americans seemed doomed to defeat. But two years later, on October 19, 1781, General Charles Cornwallis surrendered his army at Yorktown to a combined American and French force under George Washington. What happened? Many things happened, of course; but one important development that rarely makes it into the history books was this: Cornwallis's once formidable army had been debilitated by malaria. Americans, and the American troops, had developed greater resistance to malaria over centuries of exposure. Plus, they had arrived in the Tidewater region only a few weeks earlier in September, while the British had been trudging through the malaria-infested region since early June; so any Americans who were infected by malaria would not have yet felt the symptoms by early October. So it was that the American Revolution was won in part by an army of mosquitoes carrying deadly parasites.

Before we go from here to a different story of a disease and its role in history, let's lay out our goals for this lecture. We'll focus on four primary things: First, we'll examine the state of the American South in the early 20th century to get a sense of the severity of the hookworm epidemic. Next, we'll explain briefly what a hookworm is and how it wreaks havoc on public health. Then we'll move on to explore the remarkable story of how hookworm was eliminated, a story that's part medical mystery and part public health triumph. Then

finally, we'll examine the profound impact that eliminating the hookworm had on the South, and by extension on the entire United States.

OK, so let's begin by examining the state of the American South in the early 20th century. Our goal here is to get a sense of the severity of this hookworm epidemic. Let's start by briefly explaining what actually a hookworm is and why it poses such a great public health threat. Hookworms are parasites; and parasites, of course, are tiny living things that live off of larger living things. The word "parasite" has a wonderful origin, a phrase; it comes from the Ancient Greek that means "one who eats at the table of another." It's a great word origin; it really gets to the point, right? Some parasites live on the surface of another living being. If you've seen a nature show about Africa, for example, you've probably learned a little bit about those birds that we often see sitting on the backs of zebras and rhinos? This is a parasitical relationship. The birds benefit from the bugs that they find on the zebras' and the rhinos' skin, and the zebras and the rhinos benefit from essentially pest control.

Other parasites live within a host animal, and because parasites cannot produce food, they rely on their host for nourishment; and that's where they do their greatest damage. Some parasites release toxins or they damage vital organs. River blindness, for example, affects millions of people in Africa and it's caused by a water-borne parasite. One parasite I think we've all heard of is the tapeworm, and we've probably all joked at one point or another to a friend who has a seemingly insatiable appetite that they must have a tapeworm; but the truth is if you know anything about tapeworms you realize they are horrible afflictions. A tapeworm in a human being can grow up to 30 feet long and rob a person of vital nutrition and ultimately kill them. Other parasitic worms include the pinworm, the roundworm, liver fluke, and the topic of today's lecture, hookworm. Modern Americans today, thankfully, give little thought to these dreadful creatures. But in much of the developing world, parasites take a terrible toll. In fact, experts at the World Health Organization estimate that as many as 740 million people worldwide in 2010 suffer from hookworm alone; that's just hookworm.

So what is this hookworm and what precisely does it do? A hookworm is actually tiny—it's only about a centimeter in length—and it lives in a human

being's intestine and they can live up to five years. During that time, it sucks blood from a person, causing the person to become anemic. Anemia is a serious medical condition; it impairs cognitive development and it drains a person of their energy. Its effects are especially devastating in children because it affects them while they're growing and it hinders their mental and physical development with lifelong effects. Where does this hookworm come from? The hookworm is a tropical parasite and it probably came to America on a slave ship sometime in the 1600s or 1700s. For centuries, it apparently remained just a minor kind of isolated problem throughout the American South; but it exploded across the South after the Civil War, and this was probably due to the mass mobilization of millions of Southern men into the Confederate Army. By the early 20th century, as much as 43 percent of the South's population was infected with hookworms. Just think about that: 43 percent; that's almost half the population affected by this horrible parasite. At the time, few people knew really anything about hookworms or their symptoms.

To Northerners—who for decades before the Civil War had come to see the South as a backward place of illiteracy, ignorance, and laziness—the fact that Southerners, especially those in rural areas, appeared sluggish and unintelligent just confirmed these long-held notions; these really hard stereotypes that Northerners had about Southerners. This stereotype seemed to explain why the South, not only the people sort of seemed sluggish but also that region-wide, the whole region lagged way behind the North in economic development, household income, literacy, education; pretty much any category you could think of. This idea that Southerners were just somehow backward explained these statistics. Just to give you a couple of examples of the relative comparison between the two regions: In 1900, per capita income in the South was one-third that of the per capita income in New England. Put another way, the high school graduation rate in the Midwest was three times that of the South. Northerners just attributed these things to the “backwardness” of the South, sort of enforcing that long-standing stereotype.

This was the situation in the early 20th century when a young scientist named Charles W. Stiles announced that he had discovered an American hookworm that he suspected was widespread in the South and a leading cause of health

problems in the region. Who was this guy? Stiles was born in New York in 1867; and he grew up to study medical zoology at some of the greatest universities in Europe, and he returned to the United States an expert in helminthology, or the study of parasitic worms. In 1891, at the age of 24, he took a job as a medical zoologist at the U.S. Bureau of Animal Industry; this is a department within the Department of Agriculture. It was in this position that he began studying hookworms in earnest. He was not the first person to do so; studies of hookworms go back to the late 18th century when the first European scientists found parasitic worms in animals. A couple decades later in 1838 an Italian doctor named Angelo Dubini found the first hookworms in humans. But these early studies by Europeans found hookworms but they had no idea what hookworms did; what their actual impact was on human health.

A decade later, scientists began to make the connection, slowly but surely, by the mid-19th century or so, between hookworms and anemia. But as late as the 1890s, there was still a lot to learn about these tiny creatures and their precise impact on human health. In the United States—when Stiles came back to the United States from Europe after studying parasites there—he found that most of his colleagues in the medical profession had never heard of hookworms and therefore didn't even know about any connection that they might have to the problem of anemia. Part of this ignorance reflected the provincialism of American medicine at the time and the fact that as late as 1890 no one had ever yet diagnosed a case of hookworm infestation in the United States. Stiles was undaunted by skepticism of his colleagues and the ignorance of his colleagues, and he wrote and lectured widely at medical schools and scientific conferences throughout the country on hookworms and other parasites, and he soon developed a reputation as a leading expert in the field. As a consequence, doctors and scientists around the country began to send him reports of what they thought were hookworm victims and, when they determined that they were, samples—they began to send him samples of hookworms—so he developed this kind of database in his laboratory.

Eventually, in May, 1902, at a major scientific meeting in Washington, D.C., Stiles announced that he had discovered a new type of hookworm, one that he believed was found only in the United States, in particular, the Southern United States. Since he was the discoverer of this hookworm, Stiles had the

right to name the animal. He, demonstrating a flair for the dramatic, dubbed it *Necator americanus*, which is Latin for “American murderer”; great name, right? As it turned out, this particular hookworm was not exclusive to America; but the name nonetheless stuck. Stiles’s discovery that he made here drew some notice among scientists, but little more. Few people, including Stiles, had any idea how prevalent the hookworm was in the U.S.; basically, he had found it but people weren’t really sure what was significant about that. That would soon change.

In 1902, Stiles, now working for the Hygienic Laboratory of the U.S. Public Health and Marine Hospital Service—he’s a government scientist—began his first major investigation into the extent of hookworm infestation in America; he needed to find out how many people were affected by this. Because nearly all the cases that he’d encountered were from the South, that’s where he headed. At first, the first couple of weeks, he found no evidence of hookworm; but then he remembered that from the European studies that he had read that the Europeans had suggested there might be a connection between hookworm infestation and sandy soil and he, at that time, had started his examination in the South in regions with thicker, clay soil. On this hunch, he headed for a region in South Carolina known for its sandy soil; and guess what? Stiles found huge numbers of people infected with hookworms; and hookworms were not merely present in the South, they were epidemic in many places. He didn’t just find some, he found epidemics. Let’s listen to what Stiles said in October, 1902 when he published his findings, announcing not only that he had found hookworm but hookworm infestation:

There is ... not the slightest room for doubt that uncinariasis [hookworm disease] is one of the most important ... diseases of ... the South, especially on farms and plantations in sandy districts, and ... even some of the proverbial laziness of the poorer classes of the white population are ... manifestations of uncinariasis.

This was the first announcement of the epidemic and of Stiles saying, “You know that notion that many of you have about Southern laziness and sluggishness, this might, in fact, be—probably is—connected not

to their genetic background, not to their culture, but to a disease that's affecting them."

At this point, only a few of Stiles's fellow scientists took notice of this report; but then, in a strange twist of fate—remember we always say history is the study of surprises—Stiles's discovery made national headlines; and it started pretty much on a fluke: A reporter for the *New York Sun* attended one of these medical conferences that Stiles was speaking at (this was in Washington, D.C.), and there he heard Stiles give his report on his latest findings. The next day, the *New York Sun*—which at the time was a very prominent paper—printed a big article about this report under the eye-catching headline, "Germ of Laziness Found" (that's a pretty bold claim, it would certainly get people's attention); then the sub-headline, "Disease of the 'Cracker' and of Some Nations Identified." The use of that word "cracker" in the headline gives you an idea of that really hard stereotype that Northerners had regarding Southerners. Despite the reporter's loose terminology—he's calling hookworm a "germ"—news of Stiles's discovery spread rapidly in the American media and eventually to the media in Europe. It was an unconventional way to spread scientific knowledge, but Stiles immediately recognized the value of publicity, even if it wasn't entirely accurate the way that the press covered it, and quite frankly, even though it was sensational. It would have taken years of research and publishing and studies and delivering his information before conferences before the public might take notice. Now, with the publication of this article, the public had a term—"the germ of laziness"—and the knowledge of it grew widely. Stiles later wrote that this reporter had done such a great thing; he said, "Public health workers and the laity owe him [this reporter] a great debt of gratitude."

Now before we go any further, let's pause for a moment to consider how big a problem the hookworm posed to the South. Is it possible to measure the negative impact of the hookworm on the South? Yes it is, at least to some degree. Studies of the energy-sapping hookworm have determined that it can reduce a workers' productivity between 40 and 60 percent, basically turning a person to half as productive or worse than they normally would be. Other recent studies have concluded that the large gap—this gap that we mentioned earlier—between the North and South in, say, the year 1910,

about 20 percent of this gap between North and South was due exclusively to the negative impact of hookworm infestation. So it's a big deal.

OK, let's get back to the story: "The germ of laziness" makes headlines in 1902, and it is kind of a catchy phrase; but it's actually seven long years before Stiles managed to get any meaningful action taken to eradicate the hookworm scourge. Part of the problem was that many people who read these newspaper articles scoffed at the idea that there was a medical explanation for laziness. Indeed, Stiles was made the object of a lot of sneering editorials and snide political cartoons, basically ridiculing him. Stiles also encountered a big problem when he went south and tried to talk to Southerners about this problem. Many of them resented the notion that the region suffered from laziness or backwardness at all, even if Stiles tried to explain to them that it wasn't their fault, it was caused by a disease. Few Southern public officials wanted to hear about his ideas for taking on the hookworm; and the same was true of the average Southern physician. To them, Stiles seemed like a meddling Yankee government official who dared to tell them how to practice medicine and to promote public health.

What happened to change his luck? Stiles's luck finally changed in 1909 when he was introduced to a man named Frederick Gates. Gates was the man in charge of oil magnate John D. Rockefeller's growing philanthropic efforts—he's the right man to meet—and Rockefeller, like Carnegie and other industrialists of the age, believed that philanthropy should only be dispensed in ways that provided opportunity for those with initiative and intelligence to succeed. It was essential, they believed, that charity not encourage dependence; in fact, some of them even said it's better to burn your money than to donate it to an ill-conceived charitable cause. This idea of sort of targeted charity explains Carnegie's famous program of funding more than 1,000 public libraries. These institutions were "ladders" for hardworking self-starters to climb, not for slackers. Because Rockefeller shared these same views, he liked the idea of funding a public health initiative that would remove obstacles to individual achievement. It was the proverbial "helping hand," not a hand out. So, in short order, Rockefeller proved the gift of \$1 million—the equivalent of about \$20 million in today's money—to establish the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease. Its mission was, in Rockefeller's words, "to bring about

a co-operative movement of the Medical Profession, Public Health Officials, Boards of Trade, Churches, Schools, the Press, and other agencies, for the cure and prevention of hookworm disease.”

What did Stiles and the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission do? First order of business was to set out to answer an important question: How many people were infected? To answer this question, they collected data from 1.5 million people across 11 states and determined that more than 40 percent of the population was infected with hookworms. Another way to see the pervasiveness of the problem was by looking on a county-by-county basis: In 1911, their investigation showed that in Virginia, of 100 counties studied, 93 of them had infestation. In North Carolina, 99 out of 100 counties found people with hookworms. In South Carolina, 42 out of 42; in Mississippi, 77 out of 79; you get the idea, it’s pretty pervasive. To make matters worse, many rural Southerners also suffered from other health problems including malnutrition, malaria, and pellagra, which was a vitamin deficiency that led to horrible, even fatal, symptoms. Regarding another problem, malnutrition: There were many studies being conducted at the time, and one in 1914 revealed that 25 percent of white children and 38 percent of black children were malnourished; and, of course, a malnourished body is more susceptible to disease and to other health problems.

The second effort of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission was to launch a massive public information campaign. This effort was extremely important because many Southerners, notably politicians and newspaper editors, had reacted very angrily to Stiles’s characterization of the South as a place wracked by poverty, poor health, and laziness. This was just another effort, they believed, of the North to besmirch the reputation and honor of the South. One editor wrote, “Where was this hookworm or lazy disease when it took five Yankee soldiers to whip one Southerner?” There’s a lot of resistance to this, and so public information was going to be crucial. To change public attitudes, within two years of its origin, the Sanitary Commission delivered 3,600 public lectures all across the South, many of them with slides provided by the commission to show people what the problem was. The commission also distributed about a million bulletins on sanitation. Workers for the commission visited 9,400 teachers to educate them about the problem of hookworm infestation and to help them to teach students how to avoid

it. They also visited 5,200 physicians, and this was extremely important because the physicians were sort of the front lines of defense here; and since many of the South's 20,000 or so doctors initially did not think the problem was real or serious, reaching them and convincing them and teaching them about the problem was vital.

Commission workers also visited 673 newspapers, and they preprinted and handed out articles to these newspapers, basically saying, "We'll do this work for you, just run this article about hookworm." Many newspapers that initially opposed the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission soon came around to enthusiastically back the campaign of hookworm eradication. Let's listen to what one editor of a newspaper in Alabama had to say; this was an editor who initially was very hostile to it. He said that this is:

An inspiring fight to the patriotic lover of America, for it shows how when philanthropist and scientist furnish the means and the knowledge how quickly American people, through their state and county government and by their individual efforts, will help to solve certainly a problem that was for centuries deemed unsolvable.

They're successful in generating a certain amount of enthusiasm. Many newspapers ran "before and after" photos—which, of course, were supplied by the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission—of families that had been cured of hookworm; and one of these photos showed a young, healthy boy with a caption: "He is industrious and capable now; but he was an invalid until he was relieved of hookworm disease." This is very effective advertising; propaganda, if you will.

A third dimension of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission's efforts was to establish traveling dispensaries to go from town to town; and to increase their chances of success, these traveling dispensaries borrowed from the practices of popular traveling evangelical missions and camp meetings, which, of course, was very popular in the Bible belt. For example, they stirred up excitement about the dispensary by running ads in local newspapers announcing several weeks early in advance the arrival of these dispensaries. One of the typical ads went as follows: "Everyone should visit these dispensaries [to] see if they have any of these diseases. If you have, medicine

will be given that will change you from a tired, indolent, despondent kind of man to one who goes about his work with a vim and a rush.” Visitors to these dispensaries were treated to a variety of experiences drawn directly from religious revivals. They brought forth individuals who had been cured and interviewed them before the crowd; so this was sort of like born again testimonials of people. Then, at one point, one of the public health officers would give a lively lecture on hookworms, very much like a revival sermon. Then some men seated nearby peering into microscopes looking at samples provided by a few volunteers would announce that had discovered indeed there was hookworm infestation in that community; and then the victims, who were identified, would then be paraded forward to receive their free medicine, like sinners coming forward to be baptized. Traveling dispensaries also borrowed from the circus sideshow: They actually allowed people to step up and look into microscopes to see what these hookworms looked like. Everybody who attended received medical evaluations and if they were infected they received free medicine to eradicate it. Let’s listen to one description of these traveling dispensaries to get a sense of the enthusiasm and this kind of religious connection:

The people came in throngs; they came by boat, by train, by private conveyance for 20 and 30 miles. Our records contain stories of men, women, and children walking in over country roads 10 and 12 miles, the more anemic at times falling by the way, to be picked up and brought in by neighbors passing with wagons. As many as 455 people have been treated at one place in one day. ... A friend who had just visited some of the dispensaries said to me recently: “It looks like the days of Galilee.”

You get an idea; there’s a certain amount of enthusiasm here.

There’s more to their efforts: A fourth component of this hookworm eradication campaign—and this is one of the most important—was the promotion of outhouse or what we might call “privy” construction. Today, we might think of the outhouse as something very primitive and backward; but in the context of rural poverty in the early 20th century, outhouses represented a great advance in public health. Simply put, before 1910 the great majority of rural Southerners had no flush toilets or outhouses for the

disposal of human waste; they simply used the great outdoors. One public health investigator, a man in Louisiana when evaluating the public schools, criticized Louisiana for “not having progressed in the matter of sewage disposal as far as the ancient Hebrews in the days of Moses.” The problem here was straightforward: Hookworm eggs and larvae live in human waste. A person walking around barefoot on contaminated soil would pick up the larvae that then would burrow into the skin of their feet, entering the body’s bloodstream. Eventually, the hookworm makes it way to the small intestine where it taps into the person’s blood supply, causing them to become anemic and so forth. This, by the way, explains why hookworm infection was so prevalent in regions with sandy soil as opposed to clay soil. Hookworms thrive in sandy soil and they can migrate considerable distances, greatly increasing the chances of infection. This also explains why before people learned what it was, many people called hookworm infection “ground itch.”

The solution, said Stiles and the Rockefeller Commission, was simple: Teach people how to build outhouses; and convince state and local authorities to require outhouses for public schools and other public facilities. One rather zealous commission field worker adopted a unique method to spread the message: In every town where he helped organize a traveling dispensary, he built a model privy in front of a local courthouse, and on it he hung a sign that read: “Build a privy now—use it always; It is cheaper than a coffin.” Great advertising there; very clever.

These wide-ranging and high profile efforts by the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission generated a lot of attention and a lot of enthusiasm. Many people saw it as a yet another demonstration of one of the core values of the Progressive Era: that science and expertise, coupled with enlightened government, could solve virtually any social ill. Others, especially people like the Southern writer and reformer Walter Hines Page, viewed the hookworm eradication campaign as the dawning of a new era for the South. He wrote: “Every man who knows the people of the Southern states sees in the results of this work a new epoch in their history and, because of its sanitary suggestiveness, a new epoch in our national history”; so a lot of enthusiasm. Men like Page believed this public health crusade would remove a major obstacle to the growth and prosperity of the South; it would allow the South to catch up to the rest of the country.

What was the impact of this monumental effort? For starters, it lasted only four years. In 1914, the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission closed down its operations. No one believed that the job that it had set out to do—eradicating hookworms—was complete at this point; in fact, many leading people connected to the campaign, including Stiles, pleaded with the Rockefeller Commission to keep the project going. But Rockefeller and the people running his recently established foundation believed the Sanitary Commission had done a number of important things: It had verified the existence and widespread extent of hookworm infestation; it had demonstrated how to stop the spread; and, most importantly, it had partnered with Southern state governments and local governments and had succeeded in getting them to appropriate millions of dollars, on top of the million that Rockefeller had given, for public health initiatives to eliminate not only hookworm, but also malaria, pellagra, and lots of other problems.

So the hookworm remained a huge problem in 1914 when the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission shut down; but the work that it began continued as states took on greater responsibility for improving public health. They continued, for example, to publish and distribute literature on public health to both citizens and also to doctors. These states also passed legislation mandating modern sewage systems, first in public facilities and then eventually in private homes. These states also added more and more health and hygiene to public school curriculum, which would then educate kids to become more health conscious, and they also began to mandate medical examinations for all school children. As a result, public health in general, not just as it related to hookworm, improved dramatically across the South. Slowly but surely, the hookworm, or what some had taken to calling the “Vampire of the South” (a great name), was eliminated. By 1920, hookworm infection had been cut in half; and over the next 20 years, it rapidly disappeared.

This raises a question: Did hookworm eradication really make a difference? It absolutely did. Scholars of this subject offer a range of statistics to assess the impact on the South, but the most recent studies argue that the hookworm eradication campaign led to striking increases in educational achievement and income in the decades that followed the Rockefeller campaign. School attendance rose significantly in counties where hookworm had once raged

and then was eradicated. Incomes rose in these same areas by as much as 50 percent by 1920. That's not very surprising, given the fact that hookworm reduced a worker's productivity by between 40 and 60 percent. By 1940, according to one study, a child reared without hookworm earned an average of 45 percent more income.

The timing here is important to note. This major public health problem, along with others like malaria, was largely eliminated just in time for the post-World War II economic boom. We'll talk about this phenomenon in more detail in later lectures, but suffice it to say that in the decades that followed 1945 the average American grew wealthier and they grew more mobile. Millions of Americans moved only short distances to the suburbs, but millions more moved into the West and into the South to a region called the "sun belt." For the South, this migration started slowly, but by the 1960s a steady stream of Americans began resettling in the South. Several things made this possible: One was air conditioning; the other was the rise of the tourism industry; and also the movement of businesses like banking, manufacturing, defense, and telecommunications to the South. Since the 1980s, the South has seen the nation's greatest increase in population. According to the census of 2010, the South saw its population rise 14.3 percent compared to just 4 percent for the Northeast and the Midwest. Clearly this transformation was caused by many, many factors; but the first significant one, the turning point, began in 1909 with the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission's campaign to eradicate the hookworm epidemic.

Before we wrap up, let's look at one more significance of this hookworm eradication story. It plays an important role in the debates over modern-day efforts to eliminate poverty in the developing world. Some international aid agencies argue that priority must be given to initiatives that lend money and promote economic and legal reform as prerequisites for raising a country out of poverty. But others insist that a more effective approach is to start with disease eradication, like epidemic diseases; trying to eliminate AIDS, malaria, river blindness and even hookworm. These diseases must be conquered first, they argue, in order to allow more children to go to school and grow into healthy and productive workers. The American campaign against the hookworm is often cited as a model example of just such an approach.

So for these many reasons, the 1909 hookworm eradication campaign in the American South marked a significant turning point in American history.

We'll have to leave it there in this discussion of this amazing story and how the hookworm was eventually eradicated. Our next lecture, we'll explore the story of the women's suffrage movement and how a decision made in 1917 helped propel it to final victory. Thank you.

1917 Votes for Women! The 19th Amendment

Lecture 33

Nearly 70 years after the Seneca Falls Convention, most American women had no voting rights. On January 10, 1917, the National Women's Party began picketing the White House. The Wilson administration ordered their arrest. Jailed suffragists began hunger strikes and were often beaten and force fed, arousing public outrage and sympathy. The government eventually cast their support behind the Nineteenth Amendment, granting all American women the right to vote. This led to a dramatic expansion of American democracy and significant changes in American politics.

On November 1, 1872, Susan B. Anthony and three women's rights activists entered the Rochester, New York, voter registration office and demanded to register. Four days later, Anthony and a dozen other women cast ballots but were arrested for voting illegally. Women's suffrage would wait another 48 years.

Long before 1920, women could vote in certain locations and limited situations. New Jersey's constitution, for example, allowed women who owned more than \$250 in property to vote, although this right was rescinded in 1807, along with blacks' voting rights.

Women who were heavily involved in the Second Great Awakening revivals were at the forefront of the abolition and temperance movements, which gave them experience at organizing. Then, when women were banned from the 1840 International Anti-Slavery Convention in London, two attendees, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, vowed to fight for women's equality.

Legally, 19th-century women had almost no rights—not to vote, to sue, to serve on a jury, to own property, to divorce, nor to custody of their children. Women's only duties were to manage their homes; raise Christian, republican children; and civilize and tame their husbands.

The world's first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, on July 19–20, 1848. There were 300 attendees—men and women, including luminaries like Frederick Douglass. The convention produced the Declaration of Sentiments, signed by 68 women and 32 men, a daring statement of women's rights that evoked the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal." The convention also passed a series of resolutions; the most controversial was to work toward women's suffrage.

The Seneca Falls Convention started a national conversation about women's rights and empowered and inspired women activists. The Civil War put a brief



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The same skills women developed on the forefront of the abolition and temperance movements were put to use in the cause of women's suffrage.

hold on such activism but provided women with new opportunities on the home front and as battlefield nurses. After the Union victory, women wanted their equality established along with African Americans', yet the Fourteenth Amendment explicitly declared voting a male privilege for the first time in American history.

To deny women the vote was to engage in taxation without representation.

In 1878, the Women's Suffrage Amendment was introduced into Congress. It went nowhere, and its wording remained unchanged up through 1920. Meanwhile, in the 1890s, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho extended the franchise to women, followed by Washington, California, Arizona, Kansas, and Oregon in the 1910s.

Opponents of suffrage said women had enough political influence already through their husbands, that their proper sphere was in the home, and that their desire to vote threatened masculinity. Women replied that voting was a right of citizenship and an expansion of the liberty promised by the Declaration. To deny women the right to vote was to engage in taxation without representation.

Women began turning to more aggressive tactics. In 1913, they paraded in Washington DC on Woodrow Wilson's inauguration day. The women were attacked, and police did little to help them, but it stirred huge publicity for the movement.

In 1916, Alice Paul founded the National Women's Party to take new and bold action toward women's rights. She and the party began picketing the White House on January 11, 1917, using Wilson's own words against him: "Kaiser Wilson, have you forgotten your sympathy with the poor Germans because they were not self-governed? 20,000,000 American women are not self-governed. Take the beam out of your own eye."

Wilson had the protesters arrested multiple times, but after Paul and others went on a hunger strike and were brutally force fed, news of their abuse created public outrage. Finally, in January 1918, Wilson publically endorsed

the suffrage amendment, which passed the House but took four tries to pass the Senate. The Nineteenth Amendment was ratified by the states on August 26, 1920.

The Nineteenth Amendment gave political empowerment to half the nation and opened the door to women holding office. It also gave a political voice to women's issues, which would eventually lead to better treatment of women in the workplace, education, sports, and marriage. ■

Suggested Reading

Cooney, *Winning the Vote*.

Walton, *A Woman's Crusade*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did so many women oppose the movement to give women the right to vote?
2. In what ways did Alice Paul and her fellow suffrage activists use public relations to win the right to vote? Does this strategy remind you of the methods of other social justice movements?

1917 Votes for Women! The 19th Amendment

Lecture 33—Transcript

Welcome back; good to see you again. Today, we explore another key turning point in American history: the story of how women won the right to vote.

Let's start off with a story like we often do. On November 1, 1872, Susan B. Anthony and three women's rights activists walked into a barbershop in Rochester, New York (this barbershop doubled as a voter registration office). They announced that they wanted to register to vote. Initially, the men refused, but Susan B. Anthony threatened to sue them if they didn't let them register; so eventually the men relented and the women registered. Over the next few days, 10 more women registered to vote. Election Day was on November 5, and on the day before that the *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, the local newspaper, ran an alarmed and rather angry editorial. It said, "Citizenship no more carries the right to vote than it carries the power to fly to the moon." The editorial insisted that the women be arrested if they tried to vote. The next day, undaunted, Susan B. Anthony and the rest of the women cast their ballots. Susan B. Anthony voted for Ulysses S. Grant for President and she later wrote to her friend and fellow women's rights activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton:

Well, I have been and gone and done it, positively voted the Republican ticket straight this a.m. at 7 o'clock. If only now all the women's suffrage women would work to this end of enforcing the existing Constitution, supremacy of national law over state law, what strides we might make this winter.

You can see in this letter that Susan B. Anthony really believed that women in America were right on the verge of winning the right to vote. But Anthony was then arrested for having voted, tried and found guilty, and for her crime she was fined \$100. As it turns out, women's suffrage would have to wait another 48 years.

Before we go any further in talking about this movement, let's set out some objectives for this lecture. Over the course of our talk, we'll focus on four main points: First, we'll look at some of the early examples of women voting

long before 1920, because there were some examples. Then we'll examine how the involvement of women in social movements like abolition and temperance led to activism on behalf of women's rights. Then we'll look to the period after the Civil War when the women's rights movement actually split and went in two different directions. Finally, we'll examine the last years of the movement as women eventually secured the right to vote.

Ok, so let's start out by looking at voting before 1920. Susan B. Anthony actually had a little bit of history on her side because there are a number of examples of women voting long before 1920. In 1756, for example, a widow named Lydia Chapin Taft, living in Uxbridge, Massachusetts, was allowed to vote in town meetings. Twenty years later, in 1776, the New Jersey state constitution allowed women to vote as long as they owned \$250 in property. This didn't last forever; in 1807, New Jersey actually rescinded that law, which took the vote away from women as well as from African Americans. Despite these exceptions, the idea of women's suffrage became a radical and completely unpopular notion among most Americans until the late 19th century.

Before we go any further, let's stop and ponder an important question: What was the legal status of women at this time; say, roughly 1830? Legally, American women had almost no rights whatsoever. They had no right to vote, no right to sue in court, no right to serve on a jury; and then after they got married, American women had no right to own property or to have the property they brought to the marriage, they had no right to any wages they earned, they had practically no right to divorce, and if they did manage to get a divorce they had no right to the custody of their children. Culturally speaking, American women in the mid-19th century were being increasingly being defined by what historians call the "cult of domesticity." By "cult," what we do mean is a powerful belief system, not a strange religion; that's what we often think of when we hear that word.

What's this belief system called the "cult of domesticity?" Essentially, it's an ideology of an emerging middle class. The Industrial Revolution, which we talked about in some detail in our lecture on Samuel Slater, one of its key things was it began to separate work from home. This was an enormous change from pre-industrial times, when work and home basically for

everybody were pretty much inseparable. With industrialization, more and more men left the home and went to work. The Industrial Revolution also eliminated the need for women to spin thread and weave cloth; these were two of the most important and time-consuming traditional tasks for women.

So the cult of domesticity helps to make sense of this new world. It explained, for example, that women and men had separate natures that were basically determined by biology. Nature had assigned men and women different responsibilities that they were to carry out in what they called “separate spheres,” separate places. The sphere of men was out there in the rough and sinful world of work and public life and politics. Men, according to this idea, were by nature rational, tough, and competitive; but they also had a tendency to be impulsive, greedy, dishonest, and sinful. Women, on the other hand, were by nature pure, pious, sentimental, and nurturing; and their sphere was not in the public realm but in the home, away from that rough and tumble world of men. The primary role in life for women under this idea was to create a wholesome and nurturing home that would allow them to do a number of things: first and foremost raise Christian children, and raise these children into republican citizenship, and also to civilize and tame those bad aspects of men in their husband.

This notion of separate spheres appeared absolutely everywhere in American pop culture in the mid-19th century, especially in women’s magazines like *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, which was a very popular one; or Catharine Beecher’s endless run of books on domestic economy. It also appeared in newspapers, novels, religious tracts, and sermons. One Presbyterian minister, for example, said, “They are the ministry that is older than ours. It is the ministry that presides over the crib and impresses the first Gospel influence over the infant’s soul.” It was vital, as advocates of this idea would put it, that women must attend to their duties as homemakers and leave public life and politics to men. They could afford no distractions; their job in the home was just simply too important.

There were several trends at this time that were developing that are worth noting, because they suggest movement away from this kind of confining world of separate spheres. Let’s talk about a couple of them. First, we see in the antebellum era the founding of a number of women’s colleges; sometimes

they're called "women's academies." The first notable one was actually a coeducational college, Oberlin College, which was founded in 1833; the first coeducational college in America. In 1837, Mount Holyoake Female Seminary was founded; and this later became Mount Holyoake, America's oldest women's college. By the late 19th century, there were more than a dozen of these kinds of institutions, and only a small number of women attended them. But nonetheless, over time, women's colleges would shape several generations of women's rights leaders and social activists. We'll pick up this theme in a little bit.

A second key theme was the delay of marriage: Women were, instead of their late teens, now getting married in their early 20s. A third significant trend was the decline in the size of American families. Simply put, Americans began having fewer babies—specifically, American women bore 25 percent fewer children between 1800 and 1850—and the trend towards fewer births, smaller families, would continue right into the 20th century. This trend reflected the shift away from living on farms, where it was to your advantage to have lots of children, to a more industrial and urban way of life where fewer children were preferred. This also conformed with the cult of domesticity: It sort of encouraged people to have fewer children so parents could bestow more goods, more opportunities, and more attention upon their children.

A fourth key trend in this period was the growth of women's involvement in a number of key social reform movements. You may recall from our lecture on the second Great Awakening that it involved a lot of women, and it inspired many of them to join social reform movements, especially abolition, temperance, and anti-prostitution initiatives as well. The women who were involved in these movements gained a number of things from this experience: First of all, they gained experience in social reform. Second, they also were angered and irritated by some of the treatment they experienced. There's one great example of this: In 1840, at the International Antislavery Convention in London, any women who wanted to attend were initially barred from the event; literally shut out. When they protested, they were eventually allowed to sit high in the balcony behind a screen. Two of these women, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, were in attendance there and they were sent up into the balcony. Because of this rather irksome

experience, they vowed right there that they would launch very quickly a fight for women's rights. Susan B. Anthony remembered: "We resolved to hold a convention as soon as we returned home to form a society to advocate the rights of women."

For a variety of reasons, the planned convention was delayed for eight years. But then, in 1848, Stanton and Mott issued a general invitation to a women's rights convention to meet in a little town called Seneca Falls, New York. This event took place on July 19 and 20, 1848; about 300 men and women attended. The group in attendance there discussed and debated, and then voted on, a key document called "The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions." You will recall that we mentioned this document in an earlier lecture as an example of the enduring power of the Declaration of Independence. This document, written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, read (and this will sound familiar): "When in the course of human events," etc., etc.; so this sounds familiar. But then she went on, "we hold these truths to be self-evident"; ok, we know this part. Keep going: "that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." You see what she did there? "Men and women"; it's like the Declaration of Independence, but it's changed in one fundamental way with just a couple of extra words.

Let's listen a little bit further to this key document because like the Declaration of Independence, this Declaration of Sentiments included a grievance section. Let's listen: "The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world." It sounds just like the Declaration of Independence. It goes on to say, "He has, he has, he has." Let's listen to a couple of representative pieces here:

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise [prevented her from voting].

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead. . . .

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her.

You get the idea.

The convention at Seneca Falls also passed a series of resolutions. The most controversial one called for women's suffrage. It read as follows: "Resolved, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise." That doesn't sound all that radical to us, but it almost didn't pass this convention because many of the women present thought it was just too radical; that it was moving in that direction far too fast. But Elizabeth Cady Stanton argued persuasively that suffrage held the key to their deliverance; without it, they weren't going to get anywhere in achieving women's rights. It ultimately passed.

What was the impact of the Seneca Falls Convention? A number of things: First, it started a national conversation about women's right. It got a lot of newspaper coverage; and, granted, about 40 percent of this newspaper coverage was negative. For example, the *Oneida Whig*, which was a newspaper in Upstate New York, described the declaration as "the most shocking and unnatural event"; so they were displeased by this fiddling with the Declaration of Independence. But 30 percent of the newspaper coverage was positive, and it inspired more women to join the movement. A second impact of this convention is that it led to the emergence of the first important leaders of this movement, including (we already mentioned) Elizabeth Cady Stanton as well as Susan B. Anthony. Third, Seneca Falls empowered and inspired women activists. Over the next 12 years, women's rights activists held 24 conventions and they also pushed for legal reforms. In 1848, the same year as the convention, activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton and several others gained passage of the Married Women's Property Act in New York. This law ended the practice of women losing control of all their property once they got married.

What happened next? The quest for women's rights was essentially put on hold during the Civil War, but the war itself actually provided women with

new opportunities to demonstrate their worth and independence. Women played an indispensable role on the home front for the Union, raising money, serving as nurses, and many women believed that this role in securing the Union victory would lead ultimately to their gaining the right to vote. But as it turned out, at the war's end, most of their fellow male reformers gave top priority to establishing equality and rights for African American men. Frederick Douglass, who was a firm believer in women's rights—he actually was there at the Seneca Falls convention—made the case that in that moment, right after the Civil War and after emancipation, was “the Negro's hour.” Basically, he was saying that Republicans were going to have a tough enough battle establishing basic rights for African Americans; if they added women into the mix, the efforts would likely fail, would come across as too radical.

Republicans in the early 1860s shepherded through the 14th Amendment to ratification; it was ratified in 1868. It protected the voting rights of male citizens, among other things. When the 15th Amendment was proposed to prohibit the denial of voting rights on the basis of race, women's rights activists argued for the inclusion of gender. But, in the end, the amendment prohibited the denial of voting rights “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude”; no mention of women or gender, so they failed in this effort to secure the end that they were looking for. This decision to exclude women from these amendments infuriated Stanton and Anthony, and they rejected the idea that they had to wait for their turn; and they actually ended up lobbying against ratification of the 15th Amendment. This decision on the part of Anthony and Stanton actually split the women's rights movement between radicals like Stanton and Anthony and more moderate women like Lucy Stone and Julia Ward Howe who were, in fact, willing to wait a little bit for their opportunity to gain suffrage. They eventually founded rival organizations: Moderates like Stone and Howe founded the American Women's Suffrage Association; radicals like Anthony and Stanton established the National Women's Suffrage Association; so two rival organizations. It was in this period that Susan B. Anthony, reflective of this radical trajectory she's on, tried to vote in Rochester, New York.

The split in the movement weakened the movement overall and led to a long period of very, very slow progress. There were some important developments

in this period. Education continued: More and more women took advantage of increased educational opportunities, especially college; and by the end of the century, by 1900, women constituted 20 percent of college graduates in America. As before—you can see this was having an impact—wherever you saw women engaged in public activism, the chances were really high that they had gone to college. Just take for example the Settlement House Movement: Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr, who founded Hull House in Chicago, were both college graduates.

A second development was the Reform Club Movement. In ever-growing numbers in the late 19th century, American women joined hundreds of clubs dedicated to things like temperance, education, good government, and charity. By 1900, there were 500 women's clubs in the United States and they had 160,000 members. Just like with abolition and temperance way back in the early 19th century, involvement of women in this reform movement gave American women invaluable experience in pushing for social change; and it also made them really aware of how important the vote was because no matter all the great things that they were doing in these club movements, they could only do so much in gaining change because they lacked the right to vote. If they had the right to vote, it would give them real power and influence.

How did women finally get this right to vote? First, they put the split of the 1860s behind them and they actually merged the two organizations in 1890 into a single organization: the National American Women's Suffrage Association. Almost immediately, they began to see the fruits of this decision; they gained some very important victories out in Western states primarily that began to grant women the right to vote: Wyoming in 1890; Colorado in 1893; Utah in 1895; Idaho in 1896; so four states in a very short period of time. But the movement eventually stalled, especially in the more populous Eastern states; and this raises a question: What exactly was the problem? What's holding up this movement in the Eastern states in the effort to give women the right to vote?

The fact is that opponents of suffrage offered a series of very persuasive arguments that fit neatly within the cult of domesticity ideal that we talked about earlier. Their primary arguments were, first and foremost, that voting

and politics would distract a woman from her true mission in life, which was ministering to the needs of her family. A woman's true place was in the home raising Christian children into republican citizenship and civilizing her husband, and if you give women the right to vote the American family would crumble. Second, opponents of women's suffrage argued that women did have political influence; it's not like they were completely politically powerless. They said, "You have influence over your husband. Your husband votes for the whole house, not just for himself; and so, in chatting with your husband, you can influence his political choices." Finally, giving women the right to vote, argued its opponents, would upend traditional gender roles; and this is one of the big themes of the opposition. They argued that it would lead to a reversal of gender roles; basically, the emasculation of the American man. We see this in newspapers and magazines that were anti-suffrage; they were filled with images of pro-suffrage women dressed in men's clothing, smoking cigarettes, and having a grand old time while their husbands juggle a baby and household chores. Basically the message was: If women get the right to vote, men, you better get ready for a very different world. Another problem facing the suffrage movement—and this was a really big one—was that many women opposed suffrage. Tens of thousands of women joined anti-suffrage organizations to argue that women did not want the right to vote and did not need the right to vote. The Women's Anti-Suffrage Association of Massachusetts, one of the biggest, claimed in one of its pieces of literature, "Housewives, you do not need your ballot to clean out your sink spout. A handful of hot ash and some boiling water is quicker." Pretty simply put: You don't need the vote; it's a silly thing, you need to focus on your domestic role.

Women's suffrage activists, however, found clever and convincing ways to refute these claims—so it's kind of a war of words; a war of ideas—and they offered a powerful set of reasons why the republic would be strengthened by women gaining the right to vote. One of the most important was the purity appeal. We know how powerful the cult of domesticity was and how it explained that women didn't need the right to vote; but over time, women's suffrage activists began to use the cult of domesticity to their advantage. They argued that if politics was corrupt and dirty and if women were by their very nature pure and incorruptible, then didn't that mean that the republic was in desperate need of woman's pure and squeaky-clean influence? We

see this in some of the most popular imagery of the suffragist movement that showed women with brushes and sponges cleaning up politics.

A second and closely-related message put out by advocates of women's suffrage was the argument that voting would not endanger the American family; quite to the contrary. There's a wonderful image from a pro-suffrage magazine that shows a woman holding a cradle in one hand and a ballot box in the other and the caption says, "The lady says, 'I can handle both'"; and she's beautiful, her femininity is not compromised. A third appeal was to the spirit of 1776. Over and over, women's suffrage activists argued that their rights as American citizens were being violated by the denial of the right to vote. One of my favorite images comes from a cover of a magazine—*Leslie's Magazine*, a pro-suffrage magazine—and it shows a woman dressed as a minuteman, and she's standing next to a sign that reads, "No taxation without representation." A similar image shows a woman standing before an enlarged Declaration of Independence, basically on the wall; and where it says "All men are created equal" she's written in handwriting "and women." Looking on is the ghost of Thomas Jefferson and he doesn't actually look angry at what she's done; in fact, he seems almost to be agreeing with her. Basically you look at him and it seems as though he's saying, "You know, I never thought of that but it seems to make sense."

As you can see, this movement generated a great national debate; but between 1896 and 1909, no state granted women's suffrage. Then, there was a little bit of movement—1910, Washington State; 1911, California; three more states out West in 1912—but nearly all the success was in these less-populated Western states; and to win women's suffrage nationally, these women recognized that they needed to win these key Eastern states like New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. But other activists in the movement said this state-by-state strategy is too slow, and it might never win voting nationally. Increasingly, they began to advocate a new effort, a new kind of strategy, which was to focus on Congress and the President to achieve a suffrage amendment to the Constitution. As part of this strategy, they began to adopt more aggressive tactics: They began holding suffrage parades, rallies, and automobile tours.

One of the most notable of these early, more aggressive efforts took place on Inauguration Day. Woodrow Wilson arrived in Washington, D.C. for Inauguration Day in March, 1913, and there was a huge suffrage parade taking place that day. About 5,000 women marched, and they represented a wide cross-section of women: college-educated women, society women, as well as working class women. At various points in the parade, which was a pretty big spectacle, these women were actually attacked by opponents of suffrage, physically assaulted; and the Washington police did absolutely nothing to prevent these attacks. The parade and the anti-suffrage thuggery that took place generated a lot of publicity for the movement; but suffragists only added a few more states by 1916. They're getting more attention, changing their tactics, but the movement appears to be stalling.

What changed that led to the winning of the vote? It's a great example of our theme of agency: Women took matters in their own hands and made history. It started in 1917 with the emergence of a woman named Alice Paul. She was the leader of a more radical wing of the women's rights movement: In 1916, she had founded the National Women's Party. Her rising frustration with the stalled suffrage movement convinced her that the time had come for bold action. She essentially said, "We need to bring our argument to President Woodrow Wilson in such a way that he'll have to respond." So on January 11, 1917, Alice Paul and some other members of the National Women's Party began picketing the White House.

We need to stop right here to point something out and to take a moment to really consider how radical and unprecedented this strategy was. No one picketed the White House, ever; and now women were doing so and they were carrying placards that read as follows: "Mr. Wilson: You promise democracy for the World and Half the Population of the United States cannot vote. America is not a democracy." They're really taking it to President Woodrow Wilson, and they kept at it, five days a week for months. Then in April, 1917, Wilson led the United States into World War I; so now the National Women's Party activists used Wilson's own rhetoric of human rights and democracy against him. Alice Paul carried a famous provocative banner that read: "Kaiser Wilson, have you forgotten your sympathy with the poor Germans because they were not self-governed? 20,000,000 American

women are not self-governed. Take the beam out of your own eye.” Kaiser Wilson; I mean, that’s quite a provocative statement.

By late June, Wilson had had enough of these women; and on June 22, he ordered the pickets arrested for “obstructing traffic.” Dozens of women refused to pay the fine and they accepted jail time, knowing that it would generate publicity. The image of dozens of these women jailed deeply embarrassed President Wilson. Later that year, in October, 1917, when Alice Paul was arrested for the third time, she and several other women went on a hunger strike. Jail officials decided to force-feed them. When news of this abuse became public, it sparked outrage across the country and increased public sympathy for the suffragists. In November, 1917, Wilson order Paul and the other prisoners released from jail. By this time he’d decided to support women’s suffrage, in part because he hoped it would boost women’s support for the war effort. On January 9, 1918, Wilson publically endorsed a women’s suffrage amendment. The next day, on January 10, the House passed the suffrage amendment.

The next stop was on to the Senate. Alice Paul then went on a national speaking tour and then organized pro-suffrage rallies outside the Senate. This led to more arrests and more attacks by opponents of suffrage. On October 1, 1918, a vote on the suffrage amendment in the Senate fell short by just two votes. Undaunted, Paul and the suffrage activists kept up the picketing. The suffrage amendment came up for a vote again in the Senate, this time February 10, 1919, and this time it fell only one vote short. More picketing and more arrests ensued. Finally, after two years of sustained pressure by the women’s suffrage activists, the Senate on June 4, 1919, passed the suffrage amendment. There are many wonderful images from this moment. My favorite shows a suffragist embracing the goddess of justice above a caption that reads, “At last.” Yet, while this was a huge victory, suffragists were not quite past the finish line yet. The amendment had to be ratified by three-fourths of the states; so Alice Paul and the rest shifted their energies to organizing support for the suffrage amendment in the states. It took more than a year, but then on August 26, 1920 the suffrage amendment—what we now know as the 19th Amendment—was ratified.

Now let's ask the all-important question: Was this truly a turning point in American history? You bet it was. Let's consider three important changes that it brought: First, the 19th Amendment changed American democracy. It doubled the size of the electorate and gave political empowerment to women. Over time, women voters increased their rates of political participation, and their independence. Second, the 19th Amendment opened doors to women holding office. Nearly 300 women have served in the House of Representatives and almost 40 in the Senate. As of 2010, however, no woman has won the Presidency. This means the United States actually lags behind other democracies in the number of women elected to the highest office. Elsewhere in the world, women have been elected president or prime minister in many countries including England, Germany, Ireland, India, Bolivia, and Argentina, just to name a few. American women have been much more successful in winning office in state and local legislatures. One area where women have made great progress has been the Supreme Court. In 2010, three of the nine justices were women. A third impact of the women's suffrage amendment is that it pushed to the forefront issues of particular concern to women. Movement on this front took time, but since the 1960s there have been enormous changes in laws affecting women: laws about the workplace, about education, about sports, about marriage, and criminal laws regarding domestic violence. Was the winning of the vote a significant turning point in American history? Yes indeed.

That does it for the story of women's suffrage. In our next lecture, we'll take a look at the Red Scare of 1919–1920. Thank you.

1919 Strikes and Bombs—The Year of Upheaval

Lecture 34

Americans celebrated when the First World War ended on November 11, 1918. But the coming year proved in many ways more unnerving. When industrialists began reducing wages and extending hours, a record strike wave swept the nation. These events, set against the backdrop of the Russian Revolution and a series of unsolved bombings across the United States, spiked fears of socialism, anarchism, and radicalism. As a result, the national mood shifted decisively in a conservative direction.

Between 1914 and 1917, Allied purchases of steel, clothes, wheat, and so forth created an economic boom in the United States. Demand for labor had forced corporations to recognize unions, raise wages, and reduce work hours. Many Americans expected these conditions to continue after the war.

Soon after the war, however, businesses rescinded many wartime concessions to workers. This triggered the great strike wave of 1919—4 million workers in 3,600 strikes. Three notable strikes stood out: the Seattle Shipyard Strike, the Boston Police Strike, and the nationwide Steel Strike, all of which ended in violence and a loss for the workers.

In Russia in March 1919, Bolsheviks established the Comintern—the Communist International—to spread communism worldwide, giving rise to conspiracy theories in the United States. A wave of anarchist bombings added to Americans' fears.

May Day was the traditional day of celebrating workers' rights and was normally very peaceful, but in 1919, labor activists were greeted with police and civilian violence. In July, white-on-black racial violence broke out in Washington DC, Chicago, and many other cities, and the police did nothing to intervene. Both the federal government and newspapers attributed the race riots to radicals stirring African Americans to revolt.

Two of the anarchist bombings that year were directed at Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. In response, he established the General Intelligence Division of the Department of Justice and hired a young lawyer named

The trauma and fear of the Red Scare led to an era of reactionary politics.

J. Edgar Hoover to compile a list of suspected “reds.” The division arrested 6,000 suspects, largely based on their membership in labor unions and the Socialist Party. More than 500 noncitizens were charged with sedition and deported.

As this second Red Scare spread, labor and radical newspapers were attacked by mobs; 30 states passed peacetime sedition laws; and 5 legally elected socialists were expelled from the New York state legislature.

Just prior to May Day 1920, Palmer warned of a major radical uprising in the works. Nothing happened. Suddenly, Palmer was a laughing stock, and his presidential ambitions were dashed. Instead, Warren G. Harding secured the Republican nomination and pledged a return to “normalcy.”

The trauma and fear of the Red Scare led to an era of reactionary politics. The government pursued a conservative economic policy, favoring big business and low taxes; abandoning trust-busting and regulation. Business in turn worked hard to eliminate the unions. America’s longstanding fear of socialism was stoked to its highest point yet; the most famous result was the murder trial of Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco, who were subjected to a sham of a trial and executed. This went hand in hand with the fear of immigrants bringing radicalism to America.

Those in favor of restricting immigration won out, aided by the rise of a second Ku Klux Klan. The Klan reached 5 million members in the 1920s—not just in the South—and added anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic sentiments to their repertoire of hate. In 1924, the National Origins Act restricted immigration to 150,000 people per year and established quotas based on racial preferences; 86 percent of quota spots were allocated to northern and western Europeans. These restrictions would remain in place for 41 years.

The United States was isolationist for most of its history, and this tendency only increased after 1919. By the early 1930s, polls showed that most Americans believe entry into World War I was a mistake. In the late 1930s, Congress passed three Neutrality Acts, significantly delaying America's entry into World War II.

One very different legacy of the Red Scare of 1919–1920 was that many Americans became appalled at violations of civil liberties—free speech, free press, free assembly, free association, protection against unjust search and seizure, due process, and equal protection. This was the founding motive of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in 1920, a small but soon to be influential group in American politics. ■

Suggested Reading

Ackerman, *Young J. Edgar*.

Hagedorn, *Savage Peace*.

Questions to Consider

1. What contributed to the climate of fear and panic in 1919–1920 that led to America's second Red Scare?
2. How did the Red Scare set the tone for the political atmosphere of the 1920s?

1919 Strikes and Bombs—The Year of Upheaval

Lecture 34—Transcript

Welcome back. In today's lecture, we'll visit the tumultuous years right after World War I known as the second Red Scare. Let's start with a brief look at the situation in America when news arrived on November 11, 1918, announcing the end of World War I.

The war had lasted more than four years and generated more death and destruction than any war in human history. Just consider the death tolls from the major combatants: England lost roughly 1 million; France 1.4 million; Germany lost 1.8 million. Little wonder, then, that some people called this "the war to end all wars." Even though America's role in the conflict was actually quite limited—the U.S. lost about 117, 000 soldiers—Americans greeted the news that the Great War was over with a huge outpouring of joy and euphoria. Celebrations broke out all across the United States. For example, in New York City, huge crowds gathered in Times Square to celebrate the end of the war and they were spontaneously serenaded by the famous opera star, Enrico Caruso, from the balcony of his suite at the Knickerbocker Hotel, which overlooked Times Squares. Caruso sang a series of patriotic favorites including "The Star Spangled Banner."

These celebrations were inspired by several things besides the basic fact that the war was over. One of the things they were celebrating was that the United States was clearly now a world power; had just participated in the Great War. A second factor was during the war, the United States economy had boomed; a big return to prosperity. But mostly people celebrated in the aftermath of the war the hope that the nation would now return to what President Warren G. Harding had called "normalcy"; basically, bring us back to the world before the war. But, as it turned out, the euphoria after the war was short-lived. 1919 proved to be one of the most tumultuous years in American history; in fact, in world history. It rivaled 1848 and 1968 as one the epic years of social upheaval and revolution. The resulting chaos and fear that swept the nation in 1919–1920 had a significant and lasting impact on American society.

Before we go any further in talking about the post-World War I scene, let's set out some objectives for this lecture. Over the course of this talk, we'll cover four main points: First, by way of background, we'll look at the economic boom that was triggered by World War I. Next, we'll examine the three key developments in 1919 that underlay most of the unrest: the great strike wave of 1919; the Russian Revolution; and then a wave of anarchist bombings. Third, we'll explore the response to these events known as the second Red Scare. Finally, we'll examine the long-term impact of the Red Scare on American society.

Let's begin by examining the economic boom that was triggered by World War I. As we all know, the war began in 1914; but the United States remained neutral until 1917. During those three years between 1914 and 1917 the Allies—France and England—needed to purchase huge amounts of steel, clothes, and wheat, and they did so from the United States. The demand that this created triggered an economic boom. Just think about these statistics: U. S. exports to Europe rose from \$1.5 billion in 1913 to \$4.1 billion by 1917; so an enormous boom in trade from the United States to Europe. Then the United States entered the war in 1917. When the United States entered the war, the ensuing military mobilization boosted federal spending to unprecedented levels: It rose from \$477 million in 1916 to \$8.5 billion in 1918. The total labor force in the United States rose from about 40 million in 1916 to 44 million in 1918. Unemployment was basically nonexistent; and real wages in industrial jobs rose during the course of the war. These trends added to the economic boom in the United States as domestic demand for cars, clothes, and housing grew sharply. One important element to this story of industrial prosperity concerned labor relations. There were relatively few strikes during the war years, and labor peace was achieved largely because the federal government put pressure on businesses and corporations—especially those doing business for the government—to officially recognize unions, pay high wages, and to reduce the hours of the workday. Overall it worked. Not surprisingly, many American workers thought these improved conditions would remain in place after the war.

With this situation of prosperity and optimism firmly in place, now let's turn to the year 1919 and the key events that year that triggered the second Red Scare; and I should point out right now and remind you that the first Red

Scare, you remember from an earlier lecture on the Haymarket bombing, took place in 1886–1887. Let's start with the great strike wave of 1919. The moment the war ended, businesses in America began to rescind many of the wartime concessions on wages, hours, and union recognition; and this action angered workers and sparked a huge wave of strikes in 1919 that ultimately involved 4 million workers. That's a fifth of the entire U.S. workforce in a total of about 3,600 strikes. Let me just give you a couple examples of these strikes: 50,000 clothing workers went on strike in New York City; 400,000 coal miners defied a court injunction and went on strike; thousands of women telephone operators in Massachusetts went on strike.

Among these many, many strikes—3,600 of them—there were three that stood out. The first of these three was the Seattle General Strike in January, 1919. It started when 35,000 shipyard workers walked off the job. Two weeks later, the city's Central Labor Council called a general strike to support the shipyard workers, and about 65,000 workers from a wide range of jobs throughout the city responded and went on strike. As a result, the city of Seattle essentially shut down. The strikers then went into strike mode and they set up a General Strike Committee that soon organized thousands of workers and their sympathizers—family and friends—to maintain public safety and vital services; they knew that they'd come under a tremendous amount of criticism if things really broke down in the city. So these strikers operated fire trucks, they patrolled streets, maintained public order, organized garbage collection, and they even set up a milk delivery network for children. They also established “community kitchens” that served about 20,000 meals a day to strikers. This was a remarkable demonstration of worker solidarity; Seattle was a big union town. But the mayor and local business leaders were not so enamored of this; they declared that this general strike as “Bolshevism” and that the strikers were simply “anarchists.” A lot of newspapers around the United States printed stories along that line; in fact, they began calling Seattle the “Seattle Soviet.” After about five days of pressure mounting from critics, the Central Labor Council in Seattle decided to call off the strike.

The second notable strike in 1919 took place in Boston. On September 9, 1919, the Boston police department went on strike. The walkout was in response to the police commissioner's firing of 19 officers who had tried

to form a union. Police officers in those days were really poorly paid, and many of them simply wanted higher wages and better working conditions. Just to give you one example, many of them worked a regular workweek of about 75–90 hours. But politicians and the press didn't take these things into consideration; they denounced the strike flat out and claimed that it was further evidence of the spread, this idea of spreading, dangerous radical ideas like Bolshevism and anarchism, and they warned that the strike would lead to rioting and looting. Guess what happened? For two nights, that's precisely what happened; Boston was in total anarchy in some people's minds. President Wilson denounced the strike, when he got news of this, as "a crime against civilization." The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* went further and declared that "Bolshevism in the U.S. is no longer a specter. Boston in chaos reveals its sinister substance." Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts warned that the United States was in danger of "Soviet government by labor unions."

The most important reaction came from Massachusetts governor Calvin Coolidge. He declared, "There is no right to strike against public safety by anybody, anywhere, anytime"; and Coolidge then mobilized the National Guard, he fired the entire police force in Boston, and then replaced them with returning World War I veterans. This response by Calvin Coolidge sent him ultimately to the White House. Few people had ever heard of Calvin Coolidge before 1919, but he almost immediately became a household name, really as a symbol of law and order toughness. Pretty soon thereafter he was nominated to be Vice President to run with Warren G. Harding, and then the two of them were elected in 1920. When Harding died in office, Calvin Coolidge became President; all of this tied to the Boston police strike of 1919.

The third strike of significance in this period was the great Steel Strike; this was the biggest of all. It started on September 22 in 1919 and it involved 365,000 workers; so it's a huge strike. It shut down 50 percent of U.S. steel production; and we have to remind ourselves, steel was probably the biggest business in America at that time. This strike was not only big, but it was also national; it really covered most of the United States. It covered 13 states and many, many big industrial centers like Lackawanna, New York; Johnstown, Pennsylvania; Chicago, Illinois; Youngstown and Cleveland, Ohio; Gary,

Indiana; Pueblo, Colorado; you get the idea. It's a national strike of grand proportions affecting the number one business in America.

In response to this strike, the steel industry waged a vehement propaganda war against the union and against the workers. Immediately they dismissed the claims of the strikers that this walkout was over basic things like wages, hours, and working conditions and they charged instead that it was inspired by communists and socialists; foreign-born communists and socialists, to be precise. The goal here in this propaganda war was to inflame public opinion against the strikers, which, of course, would be pretty easy to do in this climate of fear. The steel industry did more than just react with words; they also pressured state and local officials to use violence if need be against strikers to break the strike. Over the course of this strike, dozens of strikers were killed; and in probably the most spectacular example of this, 18 strikers were killed by police and local guards in Gary, Indiana, one of the big steel centers. Eventually, industry won and the strike was called off in January, 1920. Clearly this is a highly-charged situation across the country. It led many Americans to fear that dark forces of radicalism and revolution were at work to overthrow the republic. Remember, there were 3,600 strikes that year, and these were just three of the most notable; so almost everybody was seeing an experiencing this labor unrest on some level.

Another factor that played a key role in creating this pervasive climate of fear in the United States was the Russian Revolution. In early 1917, you probably remember, the Russian Revolution began; and by October, 1917, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had seized power. Now, think about this, at this moment: "Communism" and "socialism"—which for a long, long time were just simply abstract political philosophies—were the founding principles of a major country's government. Then, to heighten the fear over this incident, in March, 1919—again, this is in the middle of this great strike wave—Americans learned that the Soviet Union had established something called the "Comintern." What was the "Comintern?" "Comintern" was short for "Communist International," and they announced very clearly that this was an organization dedicated to spreading communism worldwide. Indeed, almost immediately it seemed to be working: Two communist governments were founded in Europe, one in Bavaria (a section of Germany) and a second one in Hungary. Communism, to a lot of people's eyes, appeared to be spreading

and to be on the march, again, heightening fears within the United States. Now you can understand why so many Americans were so alarmed by this industrial unrest taking place right after the war.

But there was more to worry about. Up to this point, we're really just talking about fear, about fear of abstract threats and concerns; but in April, 1919, actual, real things to worry about began to surface. This began when—we mentioned that people were being accused of being anarchists, but there actually were anarchists; not many, but there were anarchists operating in small cells throughout the United States—in April, 1919 an anarchist cell or a series of cells mailed 30 package bombs through the mail, and they mailed them to prominent businessmen and to prominent politicians. These included people like A. Mitchell Palmer, United States Attorney General, and oil magnate John D. Rockefeller. The bombs had been set to detonate on a rather symbolic day: May Day, May 1; a day of international labor celebration. But one package arrived at the office of the Seattle mayor; this is the same mayor who had played a key role in suppressing the strike that we mentioned earlier. It failed to go off and allowed him—since nobody was killed—to notify the Post Office and they then began to intervene; and they actually intercepted and defused most of the bombs. One bomb, however, exploded at the home of a Georgia senator, injuring his wife and servant. The rest of the packages were intercepted or they simply failed to detonate when they opened. They were scheduled to open, to detonate, on May Day; so this happened a couple of days before May Day.

May Day, May 1, had long been a traditional day for workers to celebrate workers' rights; and normally the commemorations were very peaceful and similar to Labor Day events that took place in the fall. But in 1919, in this heightened atmosphere of labor unrest, American radicals and many unions organized much, much larger than usual demonstrations; and in many places they were greeted with violence. In Boston, just to give you one example, the police tried to stop a May Day parade, claiming that the organizers lacked a permit. A violent clash ensued and one policeman was actually killed. The worst violence in this May Day of 1919 occurred in Cleveland. When workers began to parade through the city center, they were met by members of the Victory Loan committee; these were essentially people that had set out as patriotic guardians of law and order and basically said, "We are going to

stop this parade of radicals who are threatening to undo our country.” A riot ensued; 2 workers were killed and 40 of them were injured.

Then, on top of this, came another wave of bombings one month later in June, 1919. Eight package bombs were mailed, and these were much more powerful than the earlier bombs, most of which had fizzled out. These bombs were packed with metal slugs that, when the bomb went off, would act as shrapnel, clearly intending to kill people. The bombs were sent to men involved in the suppression of radicalism for the most part, and this, of course, included the Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer; one of the bombs went to his home and exploded, he was not killed. Other explosions killed two people in separate incidents. All the packages carried a very foreboding note within them that said, “Plain Words: We will destroy to rid the world of your tyrannical institutions.” The police made some arrests, but no one was prosecuted or convicted, which, of course, only heightened the fear that the perpetrators of these crimes were still at large and still perhaps plotting even bigger strikes against law and order.

We should also take a moment here to remind ourselves here from our lecture on the Great Migration that the summer of 1919 also saw another wave of terrible race riots in northern cities; 20 cities experienced racial violence that year. The worst was in Chicago, where two weeks of violence left 38 people dead and hundreds injured. Many officials and some newspapers attributed the rioting to radicals who were stirring up African Americans, not to white mobs that were intent on driving blacks out of their neighborhoods. The *New York Times*, for example, ran a headline that read, “Reds Try to Stir Negroes to Revolt,” basically saying this is not about racial conflict, this is about radicals trying to stir up the poor population in the United States.

All this disturbing and unsettling violence and unrest associated with the second Red Scare eventually prompted a response, and we remember this response as something called the “Palmer Raids.” Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer had been targeted in both of these bombing sprees in May and in June, 1919; so in response, he established something called the “General Intelligence Division” within the federal Department of Justice. To head this new department, he hired a 24-year-old law school graduate named J. Edgar Hoover; Hoover, of course, would go on to become the future

head of the FBI. Hoover compiled a huge list of suspected “reds” that led to two massive raids, one in November, 1919 and one a few months later in January, 1920. The raids led to the arrest of 6,000 suspected “reds,” largely based on their membership in labor unions or leftist political groups like the Socialist Party. Most of these people arrested were held without any charges filed against them, some for a fairly long period of time, and then eventually they were released. But hundreds of noncitizens, essentially immigrants to the United States, were charged with sedition and ordered deported, and this finally occurred on December 21, 1919. The ship was called the *Buford*, but everybody called it the “The Soviet Ark”; and it left New York City with 249 deportees bound for Finland.

Most of these people, as we mentioned, were just simply members of radical organizations; but there were two very well-known people on board that boat: one was Emma Goldman and the other was Alexander Berkman. Berkman, if you remember, was the guy who tried to kill Henry Clay Frick during the famous Homestead strike of 1892. He actually walked into Frick’s office and shot him several times; Frick miraculously survived. Berkman had spent many years in jail, and now in 1919 the two of them were being essentially expelled from the United States. The *New York Evening Mail* captured the sentiments of many “Just as the sailing of the Ark Noah built was a pledge for the preservation of the human race, so the sailing of the Ark of the Soviet is a pledge for the preservation of America.” After this first wave of arrests and deportations, hundreds more arrests and deportations followed. Eventually 556 people were deported from the United States.

Many state governments also got caught up in the hysteria of the second Red Scare. In 1919–1920, for example, 25 states passed laws banning the display of a red flag; the red flag, of course, was the symbol of anarchism and radicalism. Thirty states passed peacetime Sedition Laws outlawing membership in radical organizations that were viewed as being committed to stopping industry (causing strikes) or anarchist organizations bent on destroying the government. In April, 1920, five socialist members—these are elected officials—in the New York State Legislature were voted out of the legislature, essentially expelled by their fellow members, giving you a sense of the climate. Private citizens also took matters into their own hands. Many labor and radical newspapers were attacked by mobs, they

were firebombed, editors were beaten and threatened; and on November 11, 1919, the first anniversary of the end of World War I, a mob in Centralia, Washington lynched an organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World (this was a radical labor union at the time).

How did all this unrest, fear, and such come to an end? Even though many Americans were scared in 1919–1920, the actions of Attorney General Mitchell Palmer prompted a rising chorus of criticism; and as he began to face more criticism, it appears that he tried to silence his critics and justify himself by—and we have to point out here that Mitchell Palmer had serious hopes for winning the upcoming presidential nomination; he was a Republican and thought he might be the next either Vice President or President if he played his cards right—announcing as the criticism mounted against him that in April, 1920 he had information that there was a major radical uprising in the works, scheduled for May Day, 1920. He put out bulletins warning of assassinations, of bombings, and he claimed that he had a list of intended victims. In response to this—we know what the climate was like—many states put their militias on alert, they mobilized their police forces; citizens everywhere were urged to be vigilant and on the lookout for anything suspicious; and then ... nothing happened. May 1 came and went as a quiet and uneventful day; and Mitchell Palmer, the Attorney General, was ridiculed as a “Chicken Little.” His presidential ambitions were dashed.

But the legacy of the second Red Scare lived on well past 1920. The long-term impact of the second Red Scare on American society was that it ushered in an era of conservative, maybe even reactionary politics. We can see this first and foremost with the economic policies of the 1920s. Republicans Calvin Coolidge and Warren G. Harding won the election of 1920 and they did so pledging to return the country to “normalcy.” Harding soon died in office, and when Coolidge took over he made it clear that his administration was committed to traditional, laissez-faire economics. This spirit was best summed up in Coolidge’s own words when he said, “the chief business of the American people is business.” Coolidge’s administration would pursue pro-business policies like low corporate taxes, minimal regulation, and virtually no antitrust initiatives (the progressive era was definitely over at this point). Businesses took the cue from the administration and continued the post-war campaign against unions. Remember, at this time in the 1920s, there were no

laws protecting unions; and as a result, union membership declined rather precipitously: In 1920, there were 5.1 million members; in 1929, 3.6 million.

Another legacy of the second Red Scare was the strengthening of America's fear of radicalism, which, as we noted in our lecture on the Haymarket bombing, had deep roots going back way into the deep recesses of American history. In the wake of the unrest of 1919–1920, American anti-radicalism was stoked to its highest point yet. Perhaps the best example of this trend is found in the case Sacco and Vanzetti. As many of you know, Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco were Italian immigrants and they were also avowed anarchists. They had been arrested on May 5, 1920 for the murder of two payroll officers at a Massachusetts shoe factory. Activists and scholars have debated the guilt of Sacco and Vanzetti for decades, but few people dispute one fact about their story: The trial that they soon faced was essentially a legal sham. The judge exhibited open hostility towards the defendants; he allowed very questionable evidence to be introduced by the prosecution; and he disallowed crucial evidence that the defense tried to introduce. Not surprisingly, Sacco and Vanzetti were found guilty and sentenced to die. Appeals and protests against the executions lasted from 1921–1927, and again many people weren't necessarily trying to say they were innocent, they were basically saying they were railroaded through this legal process. But they were executed on August 23, 1927. America's anti-radical tradition that sort of fed into this would endure for the rest of the 20th century and would limit the influence and strength of the American labor movement, particularly when you compare the strength of the labor movement in other industrialized societies; why America in some ways is different from those other societies. It would also shape American attitudes in the coming Cold War, which is something we'll see in a coming lecture.

A third legacy of the second Red Scare was immigration restriction. One of the strongest themes of this Red Scare was that the strikes and unrest that had swept the country were generated by foreigners bringing radical ideas to the United States; un-American ideas like socialism, communism, and anarchism. Politicians, business leaders, and journalists always emphasized the link between radicalism and immigration; and they noted, for example, that most of the suspects picked up after the anarchist bombings of 1919 were foreigners and that all of the more than 500 people deported during

the Palmer Raids were foreign-born. Sacco and Vanzetti were foreign-born; the connection was very clear in people's minds. Not surprisingly, this connection between radicalism and immigration spurred a call for immigration restriction.

Now as we all know from our earlier lecture on immigration, calls for immigration restriction go way back into the earliest days of American history. In nearly every case, these calls for restriction were largely thwarted. But in the wake of the second Red Scare, the restrictionists finally won out. In this effort, they were assisted by the rise of a new Ku Klux Klan. This organization had been established in 1915, and by the mid-1920s it had five million members. There are some important distinctions between this version of the Klan and the one back in the 1860s and the 1870s. This new Klan was not confined to the American South—some of its greatest strength was actually in the Midwest, certainly a lot of it north of the border—nor was it only anti-black; it still was anti-black, but it was also now, because of immigration, vehemently anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic.

In this climate of hostility towards foreigners, Congress finally responded; and they did so in 1924 with the National Origins Act, sometimes called the Johnson-Reed Act. This law allowed for just 164,000 immigrants per year; that's a substantial reduction from in some years over a million. They're closing down the numbers—not completely shutting the door, but squeezing it down—and then they established quotas based on racial and ethnic preferences. For example, Americans liked immigrants from Northern and Western Europe, so 86 percent of the quota spots went to people from those countries, like England, Ireland, and Germany. But at the time, in the 1920s, Americans did not like Italians, for example, and Italians were averaging huge numbers to America; about 160,000 per year in the first decades of the 20th century. So because we didn't like Italians in this period, Congress gave Italy just a quota of about 4,000 spots, clearly designed to keep down the numbers of Italians. President Coolidge summed up the spirit of the times when he signed the immigration law in 1924. He said, in his typical brief way: "America must be kept American." These restrictions would stay in place for 41 years, until 1965.

A fourth legacy of the second Red Scare was the return of isolationism. As you'll remember from our lecture on the Spanish American War, the United States was isolationist for most of its history until the 1890s. Then the United States intervened in the conflict between Spain and Cuba; in 1917, the United States intervened in World War I "to make the world safe for democracy," as Woodrow Wilson put it; but then, in the wake of the war and the unrest of 1919 and 1920, America returned to an isolationist philosophy. Polls—and you could now conduct polls in the 1920s and 30s because of telephones—showed that most Americans had come to believe that America's entry into World War I had been a huge mistake and that it had been driven essentially by business interests. Isolationist sentiment only intensified into the 1920s and into the 1930s; Congress actually passed three Neutrality Acts in the 1930s to prevent the United States from entering any future conflict in Europe, which, of course, ultimately became World War II.

But there was another, very different, legacy of the Red Scare of 1919–1920. Essentially, this scare gave us our modern understanding of civil liberties, which is kind of interesting because we see a lot of civil liberties being violated in this period. What happened was many Americans—not all, but many; some influential Americans—were aghast at what they saw was widespread violation of basic American civil liberties like freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom from unjust search and seizure, and also violations of the guarantees to due process and equal protection before the law. Let's listen to what the U.S. Attorney from the Eastern District of Pennsylvania had to say about this when he in protest resigned from the administration:

It seems to me that the policy of raids against large numbers of individuals is generally unwise and very apt to result in injustice. People not really guilty are likely to be arrested and railroaded through their hearings. ... We appear to be attempting to repress a political party. ... By such methods we drive underground and make dangerous what was not dangerous before.

He's pointing out that this is a violation of civil liberties and it's also just bad policy, because it's going to make things more dangerous.

Sentiments like this led directly to the founding of the American Civil Liberties Union in 1920. This is a very small group and, of course, it's had a very long and controversial history, but it's also been very influential. Through law suits and legal challenges, the ACLU has helped advance a more expansive definition of rights like free speech. In the 21st century, most Americans think of free speech as almost an absolute right with barely any limitations. But this understanding actually dates not back to the Bill of Rights when the First Amendment was written but rather to the era of World War I and the second Red Scare; and Americans have maintained and intensified this sensitivity to civil liberties ever since.

That does it for the great Red Scare of 1919–1920. In our next lecture, we'll explore the story of the New Deal.

1933 Bold Experimentation—The New Deal

Lecture 35

When Franklin D. Roosevelt was sworn in as president on March 4, 1933, the nation was in its fourth year of a devastating economic depression. Vowing to pursue a policy of “bold experimentation,” Roosevelt launched the New Deal, a series of unprecedented laws and programs designed to relieve the immediate suffering of individuals and to fundamentally reshape American society. He established the philosophy, method, and vision underlying these many initiatives in the first 100 days of his presidency.

The Great Depression was not caused by the stock market crash in October 1929. The crash simply announced the depression’s arrival. It’s almost impossible to overstate the level of suffering, despair, and fear that the depression triggered across the nation, and it worsened each year from 1929 to 1933, the year Franklin Roosevelt took office and launched the New Deal.

The situation was so desperate that many Americans began to wonder if they had just lived through the death of capitalism. Many Americans also lost their faith in democracy. President Herbert Hoover was deeply committed to conservative political and economic principles, and he had to be pressured by his advisors to authorize any relief measures at all.

On July 2, 1932, before a packed convention hall, Franklin Roosevelt accepted the Democratic presidential nomination, stating, “I pledge you, I pledge myself, to a new deal for the American people.” Hoover’s people were confident they could win the election against a known invalid. But on July 28, Hoover sent the U.S. Army to clear out the “Bonus Army”—thousands of World War I veterans camped around Washington DC to pressure Hoover into early payment of their service bonuses. Soldiers attacked the encampments. It was a public relations disaster, and come November, Roosevelt—polio or no polio—won the election.

Americans got a glimpse of what was to come from Roosevelt's inauguration speech. First, he spoke of the need for optimism and confidence in the face of tough times. Second, and more importantly, he announced that his administration would not maintain Hoover's approach. Instead, his administration would be committed to action.

A few weeks later, Roosevelt expanded on what he meant by "action": "bold, persistent experimentation." At the heart of this declaration was Keynesianism—a set of economic policies that reject laissez-faire and argue that in times of economic depression, governments must increase spending to maintain employment until the economy began to recover. The resulting budget deficits were necessary evils that would go away when prosperity returned and tax revenues rose.

In the remarkable first 100 days of Roosevelt's administration, he issued two proclamations: The first called a special session of Congress to convene that week, and the second announced a four-day "bank holiday" to stabilize the economy while the administration drew up legislation to address the banking crisis.

The Hundred Days also established the principle of effective communication. Roosevelt became the first president to take advantage of the potential of radio through his regular addresses, later dubbed "fireside chats," spreading a message of hope, optimism, and confidence. Through just such a message, Roosevelt prevented a run on the banks the day before the bank holiday.

The New Deal's programs fell into three broad categories: relief, recovery, and reform. Relief came in the form of job



Franklin Roosevelt used the new technology of radio to communicate his policies and ideas.

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programs, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Public Works Administration. The Home Owners' Loan Act also refinanced millions of home mortgages to stop an unending wave of foreclosures.

The goal of the New Deal's recovery programs was to jump-start economic growth. Three major programs of this sort were launched during the

Hundred Days: the Tennessee Valley Authority, which brought electric power to thousands of new places; the Agricultural Adjustment Act, which propped up food prices; and the National Industrial Recovery Act, which established more than 750 codes of fair competition for business to control production and stabilize prices. It also abolished child labor,

established a 36-hour work week, and established a minimum wage. The programs aimed at long-term social reform included the first significant federal banking regulations and the Social Security Act.

The New Deal did not end the Great Depression; it put a dent in it. But it constitutes a major turning point in American history in that it radically changed public ideas about the role of government in everyday life. The Progressive ideal of government promoting the common good entered the mainstream. Americans have since argued about the size and cost of the government, but few people advocate the end of all government social programs. The argument centers instead on how much to do and how much to spend. ■

Suggested Reading

Alter, *The Defining Moment*.

Badger, *FDR*.

Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*.

Questions to Consider

1. How does the New Deal, in particular Roosevelt's Hundred Days, validate the idea that crisis can lead to opportunity?
2. What was Roosevelt's underlying philosophy when it came to combating the Great Depression? How did this differ from his predecessors'?

1933 Bold Experimentation—The New Deal

Lecture 35—Transcript

Welcome back. Good to see you again. Today, we turn our attention to 1933, when America was deep in the throes of the Great Depression.

To give you a sense of what it was like in those days, let's listen to what a man wrote to recently-elected President Franklin Roosevelt. Writing from Saint Louis, Missouri, the man explained that he had five children and a disabled wife; and then he went on to explain his predicament:

I have always been able to provide fairly well for my family, but in the past three years my salary has been on a constant decline. . . . Winter coming on, no coal in our coal bin, and the children needing warm clothes to go to school. Two children in Grammar School, and two in High School. Cannot even give my wife the necessary medical attention she should have. Is there some way or some person [who] I can go to that can help me through my difficulty[?]
I have never as yet begged, but I must and will be very candid, that I would appreciate some kind of help for just a short period of time, so that I can get caught up a little and back on my feet right again. I have always put up a good fight, and worked many a day when I was almost unable to stand up; but all to no avail. I am 50 years old, and never missed an unnecessary day from work. . . . Thanking you in advance for any help, advice or information given me, I remain, your humble servant.

In that letter, one of the most important things about the letter is at the end the man, when he signs it, writes “Please keep this confidential” because he’s so embarrassed about having to ask for assistance. In this letter, we see two key aspects of the Great Depression: First, we see the level of desperation faced by millions of average Americans in the face of the greatest economic downturn in the nation’s history; and second, we see the remarkable and unprecedented effect that President Franklin Roosevelt had on the American public just a few months into his administration.

Before we go any further in talking about the Great Depression and the New Deal, let's set out the objectives for this lecture. We'll concentrate on four main points: First, we'll set the context for the New Deal by looking at the impact of the Great Depression on American society from 1929–1933. Then, we'll turn to the election of 1932 that brought Franklin Roosevelt into the White House. Next, we'll explore in some detail the legendary whirlwind of legislative activity and policymaking that came to be known as “the first 100 days” and how those accomplishments set the tone for the rest of the 1930s. Finally, we'll wrap up with an assessment of the New Deal as a turning point in American history.

Let's start by looking at the Great Depression. First off, I always like to dispel a myth associated with the Depression: that it was caused by the stock market crash in October, 1929. The key thing to remember here is that the stock market is like a thermometer: If you check your child's thermometer and she's running a fever, you'd never say the thermometer caused the fever; you'd say the thermometer informed you of your child's illness. The same is true of the stock market: It did not cause the Great Depression; it simply announced its arrival. When talking about the Great Depression, it's almost impossible to overstate the level of suffering, despair, and fear that it triggered across the nation; and it worsened each year from 1929–1933, the year that Franklin Roosevelt took office and launched the New Deal.

How bad was it? I don't want to bury you in numbers, but numbers do provide us with an understanding of the extent to which the American economy had effectively collapsed. Let's just look at one statistic: Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 1929, the GDP was about \$104 billion. Four years later, in 1933, it had withered down to \$56 billion. What about unemployment, another important economic statistic? In 1929, unemployment stood at 3.2 percent; basically, full employment. In 1933, a staggering 24.9 percent; and in some cities—big industrial cities like Detroit—it topped 40 percent. Consumer spending for food dropped from \$20 billion in 1929 to \$12 billion in 1933. Industrial production declined by 50 percent. For automobiles, production fell 67 percent. Steel production fell by 88 percent. Here's another statistic: 43 percent of all banks failed. That's right: Nearly half the nation's banks—more than 10,000 of them—disappeared, and in those days they took all the depositors' money with them. Little wonder, then, that some of the

most iconic scenes from the early years of the Great Depression involve bank runs—this is when people panicked and ran to the bank to get their deposits—or breadlines, where people were so out of money and out of sorts that they had to get in line and get free food; and then, when they lost their homes, setting up shantytowns wherever they could. These eventually became known as “Hoovervilles,” named after President Herbert Hoover.

The situation was so desperate that by 1933 that many Americans had begun to wonder if they’d just lived through the death of capitalism. In fact, the head of the Harvard Business School asked this very question: Was capitalism dead? Prompting this question were bizarre scenes throughout America; scenes of American farmers destroying their crops in their fields and killing their livestock in their pens because commodity prices had dropped so sharply that it was actually cheaper to eliminate the grain and the livestock than to bring it to market, and this was occurring while thousands stood in bread lines for food. Something just seemed completely and totally wrong. The system seemed broken, perhaps even beyond repair. Many Americans also lost faith in democracy. Was this crisis so grave that America needed a dictator? I know that sounds crazy, right? But respected people, people like Nicholas Murray Butler—he was the president of Columbia University—said in a speech that democracy might not be the best way for a society to choose its leaders. Let’s listen to what another source had to say; this was the prominent business journal *Barron’s*; and *Barron’s* wrote in an editorial on this theme of whether democracy was the best way to go: “Of course we all realize that dictatorships and even semi- dictatorships in peace time are quite contrary to the spirit of American institutions. ... And yet ... we return repeatedly to the thought that a mild species of dictatorship will help us over the roughest spots in the road ahead.” The fact that respectable Americans were floating the idea that dictatorship might be necessary gives you a sense of the fear and the anxiety that pervaded the country during these early years of the Great Depression.

So given these dire circumstances, what was the federal government’s response? The short answer is that the Hoover administration did more than any previous administration in office during a severe economic depression, but it wasn’t nearly enough. Hoover was a brilliant man with an incredible record of public service leading up to his presidency. But he was also a man

deeply committed to conservative political and economic principles, and he had to be pressured by his advisors to authorize any relief measures. Let's listen to what Hoover had to say when trying to explain to the American people that his hands were tied; that he really couldn't do much because it would be more harmful than good: "Economic depression cannot be cured by legislative action or executive pronouncement. Economic wounds must be healed by the action of the cells of the economic body—the producers and consumers themselves." So government can't do anything about depressions or downturns, it just has to be done by the people themselves; they have to work a little bit harder. This may have been sound economic advice, but it failed to take into account the fact that while the economy might be healing itself, millions of Americans were losing their jobs, their homes, and their savings. Many were even on the verge of starvation.

Now let's turn to the pivotal Election of 1932. By 1932, with the nation still in the throes of the Great Depression, Hoover faced the unenviable task of running for reelection. In early July, 1932, the Democratic Party held their convention in Chicago and nominated Franklin D. Roosevelt, who at the time was the governor of New York and a distant cousin to former president Theodore Roosevelt. In those days, candidates stayed away from nominating conventions—the idea was if they went to the convention they would look too eager—so Roosevelt stayed behind in New York and listened to the convention on the radio. But as soon as it became clear that he'd won the nomination, Roosevelt broke with tradition and he flew immediately to Chicago to become the first candidate ever to deliver an acceptance speech at a presidential nominating convention. On July 2, before a packed convention hall, he accepted the nomination and said, "I pledge you, I pledge myself, to a new deal for the American people." That phrase, "New Deal," was an attempt to make a connection to his very popular cousin Theodore Roosevelt's famous "Square Deal" program of 1904; and it stuck.

The funny thing is, when Hoover's people listened to the radio broadcast of the Democratic convention and they heard the announcer say something along the lines of, "And now Governor Roosevelt is being helped to his feet and guided to the podium," they were thrilled. They knew, as everybody at the time knew, that Roosevelt had been afflicted with polio over a decade earlier; and in those days, people with crippling afflictions were expected

basically to drop out of public life. They were deemed weak and unfit for the rigors of a demanding job. So here was Roosevelt being exposed on national radio essentially, in the terms of the day, as an “invalid” as he accepted the nomination. Hoover’s people came away from the broadcast convinced that Roosevelt was finished and Hoover, despite all the problems with the economy, was guaranteed a second term.

But a little over three weeks later, it was Roosevelt’s team that suddenly became convinced that they’d win the election in November; and they thought this because on July 28, President Hoover decided that he’d had enough of the so-called “Bonus Army” that was encamped around Washington. The “Bonus Army” was thousands of World War I veterans who had marched to the capital to pressure Hoover into giving them their service bonus now, in 1932, when they really needed it—they’d lost their jobs and such—rather than in 1945 when they were eligible to receive it; this was a bonus due them because of their service during World War I. They basically wanted it early rather than in the 1940s because they really needed it. Hoover grew very tired of this embarrassing spectacle of thousands of Bonus Marchers camped in “Hoovervilles” close to the White House so he ordered the Army to clear them out. The expulsion did not go well: Soldiers attacked the encampments; they clubbed and they shot veterans and their families; and they eventually set fire to the camps. When the smoke cleared, two veterans and a number of small children were dead. When Roosevelt and his team heard of the disastrous assault on the Bonus Marchers, they agreed that the election was all but won; and as it turned out, they were right. Come November and Election Day, Roosevelt—polio or no polio—won in a landslide: 57 percent to Hoover’s 40 percent.

Now let’s turn to the first 100 days. In the time between the election, Election Day, and the inauguration, everyone wanted to know: What would Franklin D. Roosevelt do once he took office? The answer is: Nobody really knew. Many people considered Roosevelt a lightweight and, quite honestly, a flip-flopper when it came to policy (it’s hard to imagine that now because he has such iconic status; but back then, that’s what people thought). Anxiety over this climate of uncertainty—it’s a long gap; it’s four months between Election Day and Inauguration Day—ran so high that on Inauguration Day in March the New York Stock Exchange closed, chose not to open for

business, something they had only done a handful of times in its 150-year history to that point.

Americans got a glimpse of what was to come from FDR's inauguration speech; and two main ideas stand out: First, FDR spoke of the need for optimism and confidence in the face of tough times. Let's listen to what he had to say: "So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." This call to reject paralyzing fear hinted at FDR's own past—he's using that word "paralyzed"—because everybody knew that he'd been crippled by polio and that he'd battled the dread disease to reenter politics and now here he was, President of the United States. It was a very inspiring political biography. Second and more important, FDR announced in these early days that his administration would not maintain Hoover's "just wait and the good times will eventually resume" approach. Instead, his administration would be committed to action. Again, let's listen to what he had to say: "This Nation," he declared, "is asking for action, and action now." (In fact, the word "action" appeared five times in his inaugural address.) "We must act. We must act quickly." But act to do what?

A few weeks later, FDR in another speech expanded on what he meant by action. He said: "The country needs and, unless I mistake its temper, the country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it: if it fails admit it frankly and try another. But above all try something." Experimentation. At the heart of this declaration was an economic philosophy known as "Keynesianism"; it was named for its chief advocate, the British economist John Maynard Keynes. Keynes rejected the longstanding conservative policy of *laissez-faire*, the one that Hoover had subscribed to. Depressions, *laissez-faire* advocates argued, were like bad weather or like a serious illness: You basically just needed to endure it until it passed; and that the free market ultimately would always correct itself and that government intervention would only make matters worse. Keynes rejected this, and instead he argued that in times of economic depression, governments must increase spending to maintain employment and consumer spending until the economy began to recover. Any resulting budget deficits

that came with this were just a necessary evil, and they would go away as soon as the prosperity returned and tax revenues began to rise.

FDR and most of the people in his administration, most of the people in his cabinet, were Keynesians. They were committed to bold experimentation to solve the economic crisis, including spending a lot of money. The result was that a huge slate of programs called “The New Deal” ensued. I know what many of you are thinking right now; you’re thinking, “Oh no, here come all those three- and four- letter programs: the WPA and the CCC; the FDIC and the CWA; the NYA and the NRA; the HOLC and the FHA; and hundreds more.” Relax, let me assure you. We’re not going to take what my high school teacher used to call “the alphabet soup approach” to the New Deal. It gets tedious and, ultimately, it’s not necessary. Here’s how we’ll make sense of the New Deal in an informative and effective manner: We’ll focus on just the first three months of FDR’s administration, the period dubbed “the first hundred days.”

In this remarkable three-month period, Roosevelt established the core principles that would guide the New Deal for the rest of the decade. First, the Hundred Days established the principle of decisive action. FDR waited only hours before launching a whirlwind of activity. The day after his inauguration, he issued two proclamations. The first called for a special session of Congress to convene later that week. The second announced a four-day “bank holiday” to stabilize the economy while the administration drew up legislation to address the banking crisis. Second, the Hundred Days established the principle of effective communication. FDR proved an exceptional communicator. He was the first President to take full advantage of the potential of radio and he made the most of it. Through his regular radio addresses to the American public—these addresses would later be called “fireside chats”—FDR spread the message of hope, of optimism, and of confidence that the nation would eventually pull itself out of the Great Depression. I’m going to play you a bit of one of these fireside chats to give you a sense of his speaking style. In this clip he’s promoting one of the New Deal’s employment programs, designed to jumpstart a recovery and get people back to work; so let’s listen.

My most immediate concern is in carrying out the purposes of the great work program just enacted by the Congress. Its first objective is to put men and women now on the relief rolls to work and, incidentally, to assist materially in our already unmistakable march toward recovery. For the first time in five years the relief rolls have declined instead of increased during the winter months. They are still declining.

I think you can hear that even though he was an aristocrat—and he sounded like one—FDR had a way of connecting with ordinary Americans like few presidents before or since. The first demonstration of this power came just days after he took office. Many people expected a massive run by depositors to withdraw their savings from banks as soon as the bank holiday ended. But FDR delivered a radio address and he assured them that any bank that was allowed to reopen would be sound; so nothing to worry about. What happened after the four-day bank holiday? Deposits actually went up the day that the banks opened. I should also point out that we'd already seen the power of FDR's communication skills. Remember that man who wrote the letter at the beginning of our lecture? He started out his letter by saying that what inspired him to write was listening to one of FDR's radio addresses.

Finally, the Hundred Days created the first of a series of sweeping programs that fell into three broad categories, sometimes called the “three R's”: relief, recovery, and reform. Let's start by looking at the programs associated with relief. These were mainly jobs programs designed to relieve economic hardship by providing opportunities for people to earn income. Three of them were passed during the 100 days. One of the most prominent was the Civilian Conservation Corps. It employed some 250,000 people—by the time it was done, actually 2 million people—in conservation projects. The Public Works Administration employed millions of people to build 34,000 projects; projects ranging from bridges and roads to schools, hospitals, and public housing. Later in the New Deal, with the precedent set for these job programs during the first hundred days, more programs were launched that employed millions of people, like the Civil Works Administration (that employed four million people; built 500,000 miles of roads; and built 40,000 schools); the Works Progress Administration, another big agency (that employed eight million people to build thousands of schools, roads, bridges,

libraries, post offices, and so on). The Works Progress Administration also employed many artists, writers, and actors.

The Hundred Days also saw other relief measures that did not involve jobs programs. For example, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation; that was really important for the simple reason that it refinanced millions of home mortgages to stop what was then a kind of cascading wave of foreclosures.

Now let's turn to the second kind of programs. These are the programs aimed at stimulating recovery. The essential goal here was to restart the economy; to jumpstart it and get it growing again. Keynesians called this "priming the pump"; they were going to use government spending to loosen the pump or the engine of the economy. There were three major programs associated with this that were launched during the first hundred days. One was called the Tennessee Valley Authority; another one was the Agricultural Adjustment Act; and the third was the National Industrial Recovery Act. Let's talk about the first one: The Tennessee Valley Authority was a massive program of dam building in the Tennessee Valley. On one level, it fit into the relief category because it was going to be a program that would employ thousands of people to build all those dams. But the TVA was also designed to generate significant benefits to the region as a whole, and also to the national economy, by improving flood control and irrigation; and also because once these dams were built they were going to be fitted with hydroelectric generators, and this was going to generate lots of electricity and electrify hundreds of thousands of homes in the region.

A second major relief initiative was aimed at propping up farm prices, which had fallen right through the floor; remember we talked about those farmers who were wiping out their wheat crops and slaughtering their animals without sending them to market because the prices had gone so low. The Agricultural Adjustment Act set up a program that paid farmers to reduce the amount of land they planted on. The idea here was very simple; it's like Economics 101: They were going to reduce the supply of commodities, and when supply is reduced prices tend to rise. Within one year wheat farmers took 8 million acres out of tillage. Cotton farmers did the same thing and took 10 million acres out of tillage. As a result, prices began to rise; and in so doing, many, many farmers were saved from ruin.

The most ambitious and unquestionably the least effective of these programs was the National Industrial Recovery Act. It was a huge and ambitious program. It had 750 codes “of fair competition”—that’s what they called them—for businesses; largely this was to get businesses to control production and to stabilize prices. They went to the steel industry, and to the automobile industry, and to the electronics industries and tried to get them not to compete against each other and drive each other out of business but to establish codes of production and so forth so that everybody could largely stay afloat, basically trying to eliminate cutthroat competition. The NIRA also abolished child labor; it established a 36-hour work week; and a minimum wage of \$.40 per hour. The codes didn’t work, but these other things would eventually become law in separate fashion. The Supreme Court at the time declared the NIRA unconstitutional but, as I mentioned, many of its provisions, many of the individual pieces to it—for example, minimum wage, setting hours, eliminating child labor—would eventually become law as separate pieces of legislation.

Now let’s turn to the programs aimed at establishing long-term social reform. The animating idea here was a phrase we’ve discussed in previous lectures: The notion that crisis equals opportunity. In other words, New Dealers saw in the crisis of the Great Depression a chance to do far more than just simply relieve suffering of individual people and to get the economy going again; they saw an opportunity to establish major social reforms that would last for generations beyond the 1930s. Take, for example, the Emergency Banking Act. This law, in addition to authorizing the reopening of financially sound banks after the bank holiday, also established the first significant federal banking regulations; and the precedent set by this law led to many more far-reaching regulation of the financial system. Just to name one: the Glass-Steagall Banking Act. That act was a law that separated banking from investing; and this was deemed essential because so much of the Great Depression and the financial meltdown had been triggered by banks engaging in investment activities and so forth and kind of intermingling those two things. Glass-Steagall put a wall between the two, and those laws would be on the books until the late 1990s. Another financial reform was the creation of the Securities and Exchange Commission to police Wall Street. Wall Street basically had no oversight until this point. The most important long-term reform measure passed during the New Deal was the Social

Security Act. It established old-age pensions for people over 65, as well as unemployment compensation and disability benefits; and this clearly was the central part of the reform initiative of the New Deal.

So how was the New Deal, in particular the First Hundred Days, a turning point in American history? To get to the answer to this question, we should first begin our assessment of the New Deal by pointing out one important thing that it did not do: The New Deal did not end the Great Depression. It put a dent in it; we can look at some statistics to see this: Unemployment dropped from 25 percent in 1933 to 17 percent in 1939; that's a big drop, but it's far short of normal and what you would want in an unemployment circumstance (basically, something around 4 or 5 percent). Similarly, if we look at the Gross Domestic Product—which we mentioned at the beginning of our lecture—it rebounded from \$56 billion in 1933 to back up to \$92 billion by 1939; again, an impressive rebound, but still far short of pre-Depression levels.

That said, the New Deal still constitutes a major turning point in U.S. history for the way that it radically changed the public's perception about the role of government in everyday life. For most of the nation's history, Americans lived under minimalist government at the state, local, and also federal level. At many points in that history, as we've seen in lots of our lectures—for example, the abolitionist movement or even during the Progressive Era—many groups have come forward in American history to argue that the government needed to take a greater role in protecting its citizens and promoting the common good. The New Deal represents the breakthrough moment when this idea entered mainstream political consciousness in the United States. It established the idea that the government had both the capacity and the obligation to provide its citizens with laws and programs designed to protect and promote the health, rights, freedoms, and opportunities of all of its citizens, especially the most vulnerable ones. In other words, here's one way to think about it: The New Deal pretty much killed the political philosophy of *laissez-faire*. That *laissez-faire* is still out there as a viable principle, but not as a reigning ideology. Since the New Deal, Americans have argued about the size and cost of government, but few people seriously advocate the end of all government social programs. The argument these days tends to center on how much to do and how much

to spend, not on whether the government should do anything or whether it should spend anything. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this point is to note that whenever he was asked which president he admired most, Ronald Reagan—a man noted for his conservatism and advocacy of small government—always responded the same way: Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

That does it for the New Deal. In our next lecture, we'll explore the story behind the origins of the atomic bomb and the eventual decision to use it at the end of World War II. Thank you.

1939 Einstein's Letter—The Manhattan Project

Lecture 36

In 1939, Albert Einstein wrote a letter to President Franklin Roosevelt to make the case for a federally-funded program of research into nuclear fission. The result was the Manhattan Project, a secret initiative to develop an atomic bomb. By early 1945, the project had indeed succeeded in creating the world's first nuclear weapon. Weeks later, President Harry S. Truman's momentous decision to authorize the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan proved a turning point in world history.

A number of eminent physicists—including Albert Einstein, Leo Szilard, and Enrico Fermi—fled fascism and anti-Semitism in Europe at the start of the 20th century and came to reside in the United States. These men learned in 1939 that the Nazis had halted the sale of uranium from mines in Czechoslovakia. Alarmed, they were certain Hitler was developing an atomic bomb. This terrifying prospect prompted them to make a direct appeal to President Roosevelt.

Written largely by Leo Szilard—the physicist who discovered the atomic chain reaction—the letter bore only one signature: Albert Einstein. Only Einstein had the requisite “star power” to gain the president's attention. The letter explained in brief the principle behind an atomic bomb, urged the president to secure America's supply of uranium, and urged funding of a large-scale atomic research program. Roosevelt agreed and soon authorized the Manhattan Project. It would eventually cost an astonishing \$2 billion dollars—the size of the entire federal budget in 1929.

By April 1940 a team of scientists commenced work on developing the bomb mechanism. In February 1941, they created plutonium, a derivative of uranium that was ideal for a chain reaction. The first big breakthrough took place in December 1942; Enrico Fermi and his team conducted the first successful controlled nuclear reaction. Before long there were 120,000 scientists, engineers, technicians, and countless others on the project.

Germany surrendered in May 1945, but the war in the Pacific was still very much ongoing, so on July 16, 1945, the Manhattan Project tested its first atomic bomb—successfully. Ten days later, President Harry S. Truman issued an ultimatum to the Japanese. It demanded their unconditional surrender by August 3. Refuse, and they could expect “prompt and utter destruction.” The deadline passed without word from the Japanese.

Estimates of the human toll vary widely, but most experts think at least 70,000 people died instantly.

Truman’s personal diary reveals that he had misgivings about the use of the bomb, but in his public pronouncements then and years

later he described his decision as a straightforward military judgment. His top considerations were saving American lives and ending the war as quickly as possible.

Truman’s military advisors had informed him that a traditional assault on Japan would cost at a minimum of 268,000 American lives and perhaps many more times that. The Allies had already set a grisly precedent for incinerating tens of thousands of civilians in the fire bombings of Dresden and Tokyo. And so on August 6, 1945, a B-29 Superfortress named Enola Gay released a bomb called “Little Boy” over the industrial city of Hiroshima.

The initial explosion of a single atom surged almost instantly to a fireball a half mile wide. Everything within a 4.4 square mile area was obliterated. Any human being in the immediate blast zone was vaporized. Estimates of the human toll vary widely, but most experts think at least 70,000 people died instantly and another 70,000 died from radiation and related injuries over the next year. Many more presumably died from illnesses related to radiation exposure over the next few decades.

The Japanese leadership did not know how to respond to the attack and continued to debate whether to continue resisting or surrender. Hearing nothing, the United States dropped a second atomic weapon on the port city of Nagasaki on August 9 with similar results. On August 14, the Japanese government announced its intention to surrender.

The atomic bomb attacks on Japan touched off a controversy that continues to this very day. Many historians, social critics, and ethicists have argued that the attacks were unnecessary and maybe even immoral. Einstein himself harbored deep misgivings about the bombings. Perhaps most disturbing is the suggestion that the bombing of Japan was an act of intimidation aimed at the Soviet Union—the first act of the cold war. But others defend Truman’s decision as a difficult but necessary one, based on the best intentions and available information.

One thing everyone can agree on is that the use of the atomic bomb in August 1945 ushered in the nuclear age. Remarkably, despite a few scares like the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the atomic bombings of Japan remain the only incidents of nuclear warfare in human history. Unfortunately nuclear weapons technology is spreading rapidly among less stable and less predictable nations today. Preventing another demonstration of the killing power of nuclear weaponry remains a formidable challenge in the 21st century. ■

Suggested Reading

Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*.

Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*.

Wainstock, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you think the United States would have pressed on with its atomic bomb program if it had learned of the decision by the Germans to terminate their program?
2. What do you think about President Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bombs on Japan? What about the argument that he should have waited longer or for dropping a demonstration bomb in an unpopulated area first?

1939 Einstein's Letter—The Manhattan Project

Lecture 36—Transcript

Hello again. Today's lecture takes us to the late 1930s, when the prospect of another World War loomed over Europe and the United States, and the American government decided to create an atomic weapons program.

Let's start out by thinking a little bit about technology and war. War has always been transformed by technology for the very simple reason that each side in a conflict is always keen to gain an advantage over its enemy. You can go way back into the earliest recorded history to find examples of how the introduction of new and superior weapons not only changed the course of a war, but actually changed the entire nature of war itself. Think of the advantages gained by the ancient Greeks, for example, when they developed the catapult. Think of Hannibal's famous use of elephants to get his army across the Alps during the second Punic War. Think about how the development of the longbow by the English allowed them to win the famous Battle of Agincourt in 1415 against a much larger French force. The same is true for the introduction of other weapons like cannons, muskets, ironclad ships, the machine gun, the submarine, the airplane, radar, sonar; the list goes on and on. In recent conflicts, we've seen the introduction of laser-guided missiles, Kevlar body armor, reconnaissance satellites, and unmanned drones; and think also for a moment about how advances in medical technology have changed the nature of war. Until the Second World War, most soldiers in history died of disease or from infection from minor battlefield wounds. So technology has always played a key role in war; and one of the great maxims of war and how new technology has shaped it is this: No society has ever developed a new weapon that they haven't soon thereafter put to use.

This is not entirely true; but it's true enough. If a nation is at war and it manages to develop a more powerful weapon, history tells us they will use it. Most often this decision is made without hesitation and it's unencumbered by criticism. But every now and again, a new weapon arises, a new weapon is developed, which raises compelling ethical and moral questions. Think about just for a moment during World War I the reaction to when Germany unleashed mustard gas in their trench warfare and the devastating effects that

it caused. They drew a tremendous amount of criticism. It's safe to say that the development and use of atomic weapons in World War II played a key role in the war, but they also developed and raised troubling questions that in many ways are still with us.

Before we go any further in talking about war and technology, specifically America's development of an atomic bomb program, let's set out some objectives for this lecture. Over the course of this talk, we'll focus on four main points: First, we'll look at the story of what prompted the legendary physicist Albert Einstein to write a letter to Franklin Roosevelt. Second, we'll examine how a remarkable team of people drawn from science, industry, academics, politics, and the military came together to create the world's first atomic weapon. Then, we'll explore the dropping of the atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, 1945. Then, finally, we'll discuss the long-term implications of that decision and the dawning of the nuclear age.

First, let's begin with the event that put the U.S. on the road to becoming the world's first nuclear power. Through the 1930s, FDR had grown increasingly concerned—as were most people in America—about the rise of Adolph Hitler and his Nazi regime in Germany. But, as concerned as many Americans were, they were also decidedly isolationist and absolutely committed to the idea that the United States would remain neutral in any kind of conflict that ensued; and this pretty much stayed true even after Hitler annexed Austria in 1938 and then the next year when he seized Czechoslovakia. Remember, we talked about this isolationist tradition in our lecture on the Spanish American War; but it was a single piece of information that came out of this latter operation—Hitler's seizure of Czechoslovakia—that caught the attention of a number of eminent physicists in the United States. Most of these men, in fact, were living in the United States because they'd fled fascism and anti-Semitism in Europe just a few years earlier. They included the now-famous names like Albert Einstein, Leo Szilard, and Enrico Fermi. When they learned the Nazis had halted the sale of uranium from uranium mines in Czechoslovakia, this news set off alarm bells because they believed, with this information, Hitler—they were pretty certain—was now working to develop an atomic bomb. It was this terrifying prospect—that the already

formidable Nazi war machine might soon possess the ultimate weapon—that prompted them to make a direct appeal to President Roosevelt.

We should pause here to point out that the basic ideas of physics that went into making an atomic bomb were widely known at this time; but atomic energy and weaponry for the most part remained in the realm of theory. The news out of Czechoslovakia, however, made it clear that the Nazis were pushing ahead to move atomic weaponry from theory into reality; and so the physicists in America composed a letter to Franklin Roosevelt. It was largely written by Leo Szilard, the physicist. He's the one who had discovered the principle of an atomic chain reaction a few years earlier. Even though this was written by a committee of eminent physicists, it actually had only one signature at the bottom: Albert Einstein. There's a good reason for this. Einstein was the towering figure in the scientific world. Even people who didn't know the first thing about science knew who Albert Einstein was. Many even knew his famous equation that explained the Theory of Relativity: $E=MC^2$ (well, they knew it even if they didn't understand it). Einstein had been born in Germany in 1879 and he'd become an international star in mathematics in the 19-teens and the 1920s. In fact, it was his theory of relativity that underlay the subsequent research into atomic power; namely, that splitting matter would release energy. But the rise of Hitler in 1933 prompted Einstein, who was Jewish, to move to the United States, along with all those other physicists.

The other concerned physicists knew that only Einstein had the requisite “star power” to gain the President's attention; and that's why his name is the only one at the bottom of that letter. The letter was drafted in August—it actually bore the date of August 2—but it actually didn't reach the President's desk until October 11, 1939 for a very good reason: Hitler's invasion of Poland and the start of the Second World War had intervened; all heck had broken loose, so it took a while for that letter to actually make it to FDR's desk. In this brief letter, Einstein and his colleagues told FDR of recent developments in atomic science. Listen to what this letter has to say: “It may be possible to set up a nuclear chain reaction in a large mass of uranium, by which vast amounts of power and large quantities of new radium-like elements would be generated.” However, the letter continued, and this is the real important

point: “This new phenomenon would also lead to the construction of bombs ... extremely powerful bombs.”

In light of this information, and the news that Germany had seized the Czechoslovakian uranium mines, the letter argued the United States should take steps to secure its own supply of uranium and, more importantly, begin a large-scale effort to accelerate research into atomic energy. FDR agreed with this idea, and soon he authorized the first funding for what became a monumental scientific undertaking that we eventually called the “Manhattan Project.”

Now, let’s examine how the Manhattan Project came together to create the world’s first successful atomic weapon. Let’s begin with an essential fact: The single most important factor in the development of the atomic bomb was money. That’s right; it’s not so much a challenge of physics as it was of funding. The Manhattan Project would eventually cost an astonishing \$2 billion. Of course, that may not sound like a lot of money today, but let’s put it in perspective: In 1929, the entire federal government’s budget was \$2 billion; so we’re talking about, relatively speaking, a staggering amount of money. Simply put, the United States had two enormous advantages heading into World War II. One advantage: Almost all the hostilities took place elsewhere, leaving the United States’ infrastructure, its industry (all those factories), and its workforce (its people) unscathed.

Just to put this in perspective, when you think about the damage and the destruction taking place in Europe and also in the Pacific region, this will help give you a sense of how really fortunate America was during the Second World War. Do you know how many civilians died living in the continental United States from enemy attacks during World War II? How many? The answer is five. One woman and four children were out walking in the woods of California when they came across what looked like a parachute that had been tangled in some trees. When they tried to pull it free from the branches, it exploded and killed them instantly. What was this? This was a Japanese fire bomb, one of thousands that they had sent across the Pacific catching in the jet stream from Japan and their idea was that these incendiaries would float across the Pacific and then land as they cooled somewhere on the west coast. They wanted to start massive wildfires that would cause chaos in the

U.S., panic, and at the very least divert resources from the war. Most of these “fire balloons,” as they were called, failed to ignite; and the five people that were killed only ignited it by pulling on it. You get the point: America had an incredible advantage in that it avoided the most destructive aspects of the war.

A second great advantage enjoyed by the U.S. was its economy. Even after a decade of Great Depression, the United States’ economy was capable of generating more than enough wealth to provide for the needs of its population on the homefront, to wage a major war in both the Pacific and Europe, and to fund the Manhattan Project to the tune of \$2 billion. To drive this point home about finances, consider this remarkable and very telling coincidence: In mid-1942, as the \$2 billion Manhattan Project in the U.S. was really just beginning to ramp up, the Nazis—and remember, they’re the ones who we were concerned about, and really we started this program in response to the threat that they might, in fact, be building their own atomic bomb—decided to cancel their atomic weapons program in 1942. Why would they do this in the midst of a war, deciding not to take advantage of this incredible technology that might win the war for them? The answer was very simple: The costs were so astronomical—and they actually ran the numbers on this—the German high command pointed this out that, “If we pursue atomic weapons, it will divert so much of our money and our natural resources and our brainpower from every other part of the German war effort that it will actually cause us to lose the war”; so the Germans gave up on their atomic program. Unfortunately, the United States didn’t know this at the time.

Anyway, back to the origins of the Manhattan Project. Money to fund the atomic research began to flow just weeks after FDR received that letter. By April, 1940, a team of scientists had commenced work on developing the bomb itself; the delivery system that would house and trigger the atomic reaction. In February, 1941, scientists created plutonium, which is a derivative of uranium that’s ideal for the chain reaction that you need for an atomic bomb. Then, in July, 1941, scientists determined that it was feasible to build and to deliver an atomic bomb. They had basically answered the big question: “Can we do this?” The answer was, “Yes, in fact, we can.” In December, 1941, in the wake of Pearl Harbor, the United States entered the war and research on this project began to accelerate. Before long, there were

120,000 scientists, engineers, technicians, and countless others working in giant research facilities in places like Oak Ridge, Tennessee; Los Alamos, New Mexico; and Hanford, up in Washington State.

The first big breakthrough actually took place in December, 1942 in an old squash court at the University of Chicago. This is where Enrico Fermi, a famous physicist, and his team conducted the first successful controlled nuclear reaction. As a historian who failed chemistry my freshman year in college, I'm going to keep this really simple, as simple as I can, and explain what this means: What Fermi accomplished was nuclear fission, and basically this means that they split an atom's nucleus by firing a neutron into it, and the energy released in the splitting of that nucleus then sent many, many more neutrons firing in every direction, then they would hit other nuclei, triggering more reactions, and you get the idea; and so on, and so on. The collective energy released by this chain reaction was atomic energy.

Ok, back to history; safer ground for me. The Manhattan Project's research advanced at a rate that surprised even the men involved. By May, 1945, they were ready to test the first atomic bomb. At this point, May, 1945, Germany had already surrendered—and remember, they were the primary object of our concern when we launched this Manhattan Project—but the war in the Pacific was very much still ongoing, and so the work on the Manhattan Project continued unabated. Then on July 16, 1945, the Manhattan Project tested its first atomic bomb. In the early predawn hours of that day, a huge number of scientists and technicians gathered in a remote desert in New Mexico. At 5:29 a.m. local time the device, which was given a codename “Trinity,” exploded with a yield of about 20 kilotons of TNT. The detonation illuminated the surrounding mountains for more than a second—one eyewitness said that it was “brighter than daytime,” it was so intense—and the blast produced a wave of heat that one observer described as “being as hot as an oven.” The shockwave was felt 100 miles away, and people even further than 100 miles away could see the mushroom cloud that reached 7.5 miles high into the sky. The blast left a crater of radioactive glass—basically from melting all that sand—in the desert 10 feet deep and 1,100 feet wide. The director at Los Alamos, Doctor Robert Oppenheimer, remembered this awesome and terrifying sight, and he described it later; he noted that “some [people] wept, a few cheered. Most stood silent.” Oppenheimer also

remembered later that quietly in his mind he was turning over and over again a piece of Hindu scripture that reads as follows: “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” It was July 16, 1945, and the atomic age had begun.

Ten days later, President Harry S. Truman—now remember, he was FDR’s Vice President, but FDR had died back in April so Truman took over the presidency and quite honestly, Truman, one of the first things they told him about was the Manhattan Project; he knew nothing about this massive enterprise taking place so he had to be brought up to speed on this project and also what this weapon ultimately might do—was in charge now at this point of bringing the war in the Pacific to completion, and so Truman issued an ultimatum to the Japanese; remember the Americans by this point had begun by the summer of 1945 basically to roll back the Japanese Empire pretty much to the doorstep of Japan itself. The Americans issued an ultimatum that demanded “unconditional surrender” by August 3, 1945. After that, they could expect—and this is Truman’s phrase—“prompt and utter destruction.”

By this time, mid-summer of 1945, several atomic bombs had been constructed in the United States and then sent to the Pacific theater by the Army Air Corps; and the Army Air Corps had selected four Japanese cities for likely attack. On August 3, 1945, the date of the ultimatum that Truman had issued, nothing happened; there was no word from the Japanese, the Japanese did not surrender. So now President Truman had a momentous decision to make. What was he going to do? He’d issued the ultimatum, he’d promised massive destruction; what to do? What do you think was going through President Truman’s mind once this deadline passed? The records tell us a number of things. For one thing, his personal diary tells us that he had some serious misgivings about the use of the bomb, but these misgivings he kept private. His public pronouncements—then, at the time of the bombing and, of course, years later—he described the decision to authorize the use of the atomic bomb as straightforward; just a simple, straightforward military decision. “I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it should be used.” Like a lot of things, when we have time to think about it we tend to rewrite history a little bit, and that’s essentially what Truman’s doing. Privately, we knew he was a little bit worried about the implications of this ultimate weapon.

Truman, what's going through his that mind led him to the decision to drop the bomb? For one thing, his top consideration was the saving American lives and ending the war as quickly as possible; and he relied on his military advisors to sort of give him the information he needed to make this decision. They told him that a traditional assault on Japan would cost, at a minimum, 268,000 American lives and maybe many more; so this was a pretty steep price to pay for the final defeat of Japan and the end of the war—268,000 Americans—when you had this bomb that might end the war literally overnight. Subsequent generations of historians and military experts have debated the accuracy of this number, but at the time it's all that Truman had to go on. Additionally, the Allies had already set the grisly precedent for incinerating tens of thousands of civilians. Truman had, at least in the back of his mind, that this kind of “taking the war to the people,” that precedent had already been set. Back in February, 1945, just a few months earlier, Allied bombers dropped incendiaries over the German city of Dresden and caused such a firestorm that 100,000 people died. One month later they did the same to Tokyo and another 100,000 were killed. Truman had this precedent in his mind, and he also had this notion that the bomb might save American lives.

So on August 6, 1945, a B-29 Superfortress named “Enola Gay,” a plane that was piloted by Colonel Paul Tibbets, took off from a small island in the Pacific bound for Hiroshima. Hiroshima was Japan's eighth largest city and a center of industry, and it was one of the cities that had actually not experienced a lot of bombing, so it had a lot of factories intact. This plane, at an altitude of 31,600 feet at approximately 8:15 a.m. local time, the Enola Gay opened its bomb bay and dropped the atomic bomb, and then sharply turned to leave the area. The bomb, with its nickname “Little Boy”—and that's kind of an odd name because it was 10 feet long and weighed about 9,000 pounds—dropped through the sky for about 45 seconds before it detonated about 1,900 feet above the surface.

The initial explosion of that single atom surged almost instantly into a fireball a half a mile wide. The heat generated from this blast was 7,200 degrees Fahrenheit and it sent a mushroom cloud up in the sky 55,000 feet. Everything within a 4.4-mile area was completely obliterated. Surrounding buildings crumbled, steel bridges melted, and you probably have seen images of this: The devastation was absolute and complete. If you've seen

the images of Hiroshima, you can see where the streets were and you can see the blocks where buildings once stood, and here and there a little stick or a little piece of concrete but that's it; almost like something had just come and wiped everything off the map. Then there were the fires: The subsequent fires spread the devastation far beyond the blast site. Any human being in that immediate blast zone was vaporized; and some victims left only their shadows seared on the walls of buildings and sidewalks by the initial blast; so people would be walking along, the bomb went off, and all that was left of them was their shadow that the flash created against the wall or on the concrete. It also seared clothing patterns onto people; people who survived would have the patterns of their shirts and the dresses that they were wearing. So how many people died? The estimates of the human toll vary widely. Most experts, though, agree that about 70,000 people died instantly and another 70,000 died from radiation and other injuries over the next year; so about 140,000 total. Probably many thousands died of illnesses related to radiation exposure over the next few decades.

The Japanese leadership did not know how to respond to this attack and it continued to debate whether or not to continue resisting the American attack and potential invasion or to face up to reality and surrender. The United States didn't hear anything from the Japanese high command while this debate was going on, and so hearing nothing from them, the United States decided to drop a second atomic weapon, this time on the port city of Nagasaki. That took place on August 9 with very similar results: tens of thousands of people killed instantly; tens of thousands dying over the course of the next year. On August 14, after the Japanese emperor had finally intervened, the Japanese government announced its intention to surrender. On September 2, 1945, at a ceremony aboard the battleship *Missouri*, the Japanese signed formal papers of surrender. The Second World War was finally over.

Now let's examine the long-term implications of this decision by Harry Truman and the American military to drop the atomic weapon; to essentially launch the nuclear age. For one thing, the atomic bomb attacks on Japan touched off a controversy that continues to this very day. Many historians, social critics, and ethicists have argued that the attacks were unnecessary and maybe even immoral; and when they make this argument they offer several points: One point they make is the United States should have waited longer.

What was the hurry? Japan's days were clearly numbered; surrender was inevitable; we should have given more time for that government, which was deeply divided, to figure out that surrender was their best option. Instead, we dropped the bomb. The second point that this criticism says is that the alleged massive casualty estimates for the number of Americans that would die in a traditional invasion of Japan—almost 300,000—were wildly inaccurate and that a much smaller number would have been necessary; and so that Truman was essentially given defective information. A third argument was that the United States should have dropped one bomb; just a single bomb on a less-populated area as a demonstration intended to intimidate and frighten the Japanese into surrendering. Part of this argument says: At the very least, even if they decided still to drop on a populated center, there was no justification for that second bomb on Nagasaki.

One of those who harbored deep misgivings about the bombings was none other than Albert Einstein. The legendary scientist actually did not work on the Manhattan Project, but he still felt a lot of responsibility for fact that he had played a role in inventing the atomic bomb. He had lent his name to it back in 1939 when his chief fear was that the Nazis might develop the bomb. But he envisioned the American effort to build an atomic bomb in strategic terms: We would develop a bomb, he thought, but not use it; we would simply have it on hand and let the Nazis know we had it so that they would be afraid of using their bomb. Other critics of the dropping of the bombs raised some troubling questions. They asked: Was racism a factor in the decision to drop the bomb? Was this somehow revenge for Pearl Harbor? Would we have used an atomic bomb against Germany, which was a European country? Was it easier, in effect, for Americans, with their maybe latent anti-Asian racism, for them to drop a bomb on Japan? This is a troubling question. A second troubling question was: Was the bombing of Japan fundamentally an act of intimidation aimed at the Soviet Union? In other words, was it the first act of the Cold War? Were we just simply doing this to demonstrate to the Soviets that the American military had this ultimate weapon and that the Soviets had better behave; had better check their ambitions in Europe and Asia because we had the bomb?

Of course, many people reject these criticisms and allegations and they defend Truman's decision as a difficult but necessary one. His chief

responsibility as Commander in Chief, they point out, was to end the war as quickly as possible and with the fewest American lives lost. The atomic bombings of Japan did indeed accomplish those ends; it ended the war quickly and cost very few American lives.

One thing everyone can agree on is that the use of the atomic bombs in August, 1945 ushered in the nuclear age; and for Americans, as the euphoria that came with the end of World War II was quickly eclipsed by the anxiety brought on by the Cold War, the atomic bomb provided an important level of security. Americans thought that no matter how much saber-rattling Joseph Stalin engaged in, Americans could sleep easy knowing that they had the ultimate ace in the hole. So long as we had the bomb, the Soviets would have to behave. But then, to America's utter shock and horror, the Soviets detonated their own atomic bomb in 1949, just four years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Suddenly, the American atomic monopoly was gone. This fact encouraged the United States to push hard to develop more lethal atomic weapons. In 1952, the U.S. detonated its first hydrogen bomb, a bomb that was many times more powerful and destructive than those dropped on Japan. Three years after that, the Soviets tested their first hydrogen bomb. And so it went. Remarkably, despite a few scares here and there like the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the atomic bombings of Japan remain the only incidents of nuclear warfare in human history.

But unfortunately, nuclear weapons technology is spreading rapidly in the early 21st century to less stable and less predictable nations like India and Pakistan. As a result, preventing another demonstration of the killing power of nuclear weaponry remains a formidable challenge into the 21st century.

That does it for the story of the atomic bomb. In our next lecture, we'll explore the story of the pivotal battle of the Second World War: the Battle of Midway. Thank you.

1942 Surprise—The Battle of Midway

Lecture 37

World War II dramatically reshaped America's society and forever altered its place in the world. As Saratoga was to the American Revolution and Antietam to the Civil War, the Battle of Midway was arguably the war's most important turning point. Japan's defeat at Midway devastated the Japanese Navy and shifted the initiative in the Pacific Theater to the Americans. This in turn allowed the United States to devote the majority of its resources to defeating Nazi Germany.

Japan emerged as a rising power in the early 20th century after victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. As Japan became industrialized and militarized, it grew in power and influence and sought to position itself as the dominant power in the Pacific.

Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria and 1937 invasion of the rest of China signaled its new, aggressive posture and its willingness to defy the United States. By the outbreak of World War II, the Roosevelt administration had levied trade sanctions against Japan, refusing to sell them metals and petroleum.

On December 7, 1941, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor took the United States by surprise, inflicting some major damage. But it was not a knockout victory; six of the damaged battleships were able to be repaired, and no U.S. aircraft carriers were destroyed.

At this time, America had been gradually preparing for war, but not eagerly, as there was a lot of antiwar, isolationist sentiment among the population. Now they had to scramble to catch up. Preparing for war is not just about soldiers and sailors. Those personnel need supplies—ships, tanks, trucks, planes, guns, radios, uniforms, and so forth. American industry shook off the dust of Great Depression and ramped up production in the wake of the attack.

At the start of the war, the Japanese had the largest and most powerful aircraft carrier force in the world and the world's largest and most advanced naval air fleet. Besides Pearl Harbor, they had many quick victories early in the war, from the seizure of Thailand in December 1941 to the capture of the Philippines on May 6, 1942.

As the American fighter planes reached the Japanese fleet, therefore, the carriers' decks were covered with bombs and torpedoes.

In the first major clash in the Pacific Theater, the Battle of the Coral Sea (May 3–8, 1942), the United States won a strategic victory and halted

the Japanese invasion of Australia. Japanese admiral Isoroku Yamamoto responded with a bold plan: Seize the island of Midway, 1,300 miles northwest of Hawaii, a key strategic point in the central Pacific. If they succeeded, Japan would have total domination in Asia.

Fortunately, the Allies had broken the Japanese codes and were prepared for the attack. U.S. admiral Chester Nimitz dispatched the aircraft carriers USS *Enterprise* and USS *Hornet* to Midway. The USS *Yorktown*, damaged in the Battle of the Coral Sea, was hastily repaired and sent soon after.

The Battle of Midway began at 4:30 a.m. on June 4. Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, commander of the Japanese carrier group, launched 108 planes to bomb Midway Island. He also sent seven scout planes to find the American fleet, then prepared for a second attack on the island using a squadron of reserve aircraft previously armed with torpedoes, which had to be rearmed with bombs. While this change of armaments was underway, the scout planes reported the size and location of the American fleet. Nagumo ordered the reserve planes refitted with the torpedoes. As the American fighter planes reached the Japanese fleet, therefore, the carriers' decks were covered with bombs and torpedoes.

The first wave of U.S. planes didn't do much damage, but the second wave was devastating. In a little more than five minutes, the Japanese carriers were completely destroyed.

At battle's end, the United States had lost 1 aircraft carrier (the *Yorktown*), 1 destroyer (the *Hammann*), 145 aircraft, and 340 sailors. Japan, on the other hand, lost four aircraft carriers, one heavy cruiser, 228 aircraft and 3,057 sailors. The cornerstone of the Japanese Navy was destroyed and could not easily be replaced, because Japan lacked a stockpile of raw materials.

Japan's defeat at Midway devastated the Japanese carrier fleet and ended major Japanese offensive operations in the Pacific. In August 1942, the U.S. Marines landed on Guadalcanal, commencing the long and bloody roll back of Imperial Japan known as "island-hopping." Although it took the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 to end the Pacific war, the Battle of Midway was the most important turning point along the way. ■

Suggested Reading

Lord, *Incredible Victory*.

van der Vat, *Pacific Campaign*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did the outcome of the Battle of Midway affect the war effort in Europe?
2. Was the U.S. Navy merely lucky in the Battle of Midway, or did it owe its success to superior military leadership and decision making?

1942 Surprise—The Battle of Midway

Lecture 37—Transcript

Welcome back. It's time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Today, we look at the pivotal battle of the Second World War, the Battle of Midway in 1942.

Let's start by taking a moment to consider the significance of World War II in American history. World War II holds a special place in the American mind. It's arguably our only non-controversial war. It produced virtually no antiwar movement. World War II also saw the United States play a really vital role in defeating Nazi Germany, one of the most evil regimes in history. It also elevated the United States to superpower status. Socially, the war had a huge impact on American society. It encouraged millions of American women to enter the workforce to aid in the war effort; and despite great pressure for them to return to their homes after the war, many of these American women chose to stay in the workforce. For African Americans, the experience of World War II emboldened them to return to the United States to fight for civil rights. World War II also ended the Great Depression and sparked a 25-year economic boom. But in order for all this to happen, the U.S. and its allies had to win the war; and so today, we turn our attention—as we did during the American Revolution and the Battle of Saratoga and the Civil War with the Battle of Antietam—to examine the key battle that ensured American victory in World War II: the Battle of Midway.

But before we go any further, let's establish some objectives for this lecture: First, we'll look at the rise of Imperial Japan in the 1930s and the spread of its dominance in the Pacific. Then we'll assess the state of the United States military in late 1941/early 1942 following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Third, we'll take a close look at the Battle of Midway to see how the U.S. won the battle. Then, finally, we'll assess the impact of the battle on the outcome of the Second World War.

Let's start by looking at the rise of Imperial Japan in the 1930s and the spread of its power and influence throughout the Pacific. Japan's emergence as a rising power began in the early 20th century when it defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. A lot of you may know that this is the war that

President Theodore Roosevelt helped end by negotiating the peace treaty, and that's the effort that earned him the Nobel Peace Prize. In the years that followed this incident, Japan grew more powerful as it industrialized and also built up its military; and increasingly Japan sought to position itself as the dominant power in the Pacific. By the 1920s, Japan's sudden rise to power had really begun to worry American officials; and we know from our lecture on the Spanish American War that the United States had very important island possessions in the Pacific— island possessions like the Philippines, Guam, and Samoa—and the United States feared for their security as Japan grew stronger. The United States was also concerned about the security of substantial investments in China made by U.S. corporations.

For a time by the 1920s, the United States and Japan were basically able to reach an accommodation, largely because they signed a number of international treaties on arms reduction and trade policy in the Pacific. But by the early 1930s, Japan's government became increasingly nationalistic and committed to transforming Japan into a regional empire, regardless of any international criticism. In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria, a region that is now part of China. Six years later, in 1937, Japan invaded China proper. The Chinese military was weak and disorganized and the Japanese soon controlled a vast swath of Chinese territory. One of Japan's motivations in pursuing expansion was to find new resources; new sources of energy and raw materials in particular. Japan had few resources of its own and therefore up to this point relied very heavily on imports. Just to give you one example: about 80 percent of its oil came from the United States.

Tensions with the United States began to rise over the next three years, from 1937–1940; and when World War II started, the Roosevelt administration sought tougher economic sanctions against Japan. On July 26, 1940, Congress passed the Export Control Act, which sharply reduced exports of oil, iron, and steel to Japan. Roosevelt believed that this measure would help contain Japan; sort of cut off a little bit of their supplies and essentially hopefully make them behave and make them curtail their expansionist goals. But in Japan, government officials and military officials interpreted the United States' sanctions as an act of hostility. Then, after Japan's military continued to seize more and more of Southeast Asia in the summer of 1941, Congress stepped up the sanctions to a complete and total embargo—a total

cut-off of trade—and Congress froze all Japanese assets in the United States. It was at this point that the Japanese decided to attack the United States in the Pearl Harbor.

This was a big gamble; but they thought they could take advantage of the fact that the United States military, despite a fairly good-sized prewar buildup, was not ready for a major offensive in the Pacific. Japan believed if they struck hard enough and without any warning at Pearl Harbor, in the Philippines, and other strategic points in the Pacific they could deal a death blow to the United States fleet in the Pacific and compel the United States basically to withdraw from the Pacific. So on Sunday, December 7, 1941, Japan launched a surprise attack on the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Conspiracy theorists love to argue that FDR and key U.S. officials knew that this attack was coming and that they let it happen so as to create a pretext for bringing the United States into World War II. But most historians—including this one—don't subscribe to this conspiracy theory. We know that the United States expected an attack—there's plenty of evidence of that; they'd intercepted all kinds of Japanese communications indicating an attack was imminent—but it wasn't clear where the attack was going to take place or when the attack was going to take place. For our purposes today, the conspiracy question about Pearl Harbor is actually irrelevant. Our focus is not so much on how the attack on Pearl Harbor happened, but what the attack meant to the U.S. in terms of its military capabilities in the Pacific and what its strategy would be going from that point forward.

The attack on Pearl Harbor inflicted significant damage on U.S. Naval assets: 2,000 American servicemen were killed; 187 aircraft destroyed; 18 naval vessels were damaged or destroyed. But Pearl Harbor was not the knockout blow Japan had hoped for. Six of the eight battleships that were hit were repaired and put back into service in a relatively short period of time; and, most significantly, none of the massive and hard-to-replace aircraft carriers in this fleet had been destroyed. They had been sent away from Pearl Harbor on maneuvers just a few days earlier, and so they escaped the assault. The next day, President Franklin Roosevelt declared December 7 “a date which will live in infamy,” and asked Congress to declare war on Japan. The vote in Congress was 477–1. Who was that “1”? That “1” was Montana Congresswoman Jeanette Rankin, the only one to vote against it.

She had also voted against the United States' entry into World War I; I guess she wanted to be consistent. Three days later, on December 11, Germany declared war on the United States.

Now that the U.S. was finally in the war—remember that the war had started way back in September of 1939—we need to ask an important question: What was the state of the U.S. military in late 1941/early 1942? The U.S. was pretty much where it always was at the start of a major war: ill-prepared. Through all of American history up to World War II, the U.S. fought its wars following basically a five-step process. Step one, declare war. Step two, realize, “Oh no, we don’t have a military; we don’t have an army or a navy.” Step three, build an army and a navy very rapidly. Step four, win the war. Step five, dismantle the military. The U.S. does this every time throughout its wars not because it’s stupid, but because of the deeply-held republican fear of a “standing army”; and you may recall that we’ve mentioned this idea a number of times over the course of these lectures, for example, the lecture on the Election of 1800. Because Americans associated standing armies with tyranny, they kept their armies small during peacetime.

Truth be told, the situation in late 1941 wasn’t as bad as I’ve described it or as bad as it might have been. Despite antiwar sentiment that was rising through the 1930s and that isolationist sentiment that I’ve talked about before in other lectures, and several Neutrality Acts that were passed by Congress to narrow the chances of U.S. involvement in a coming European war, FDR had managed a modest prewar buildup. The army, for example, had numbered only 175,000 in 1939, and it had risen by 1941 to 1.5 million. This was a big jump, but it’s a far cry from the eventual total of 16 million servicemen and women by 1945; so it’s better than usual, but still way short of what America was really going to need. And remember, war is not just about soldiers and sailors; it’s about stuff. What do I mean by that? To fight a war, you need soldiers and sailors, and you also need stuff: You need ships, tanks, trucks, planes, guns, radios, uniforms, helmets, boots, you name it; you need a lot of stuff. By 1941, American industry had begun to ramp up and shake off the dust of the Great Depression. But it would take time—it would take months, even years in some cases—for the full power of American industry to be focused on the war effort and began to churn out the massive quantities of wartime materiel.

On another note, we should note that in the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor, America was not only ill-prepared to fight wars in Europe and in the Pacific, the American people were also quite terrified; and this was especially true on the West coast where Americans feared a Japanese invasion. This fear, combined with anti-Asian racism, led to calls for the removal of all people of Japanese ancestry from the West coast; and this anti-Japanese hysteria reached such a fever pitch that President Roosevelt eventually capitulated and in February, 1942, he authorized the removal of about 110,000 Japanese Americans, most of them American citizens, to internment camps on the interior. One of the more regrettable moments in American history, I think. The main point here is that the United States was both anxious and unprepared.

What about the Japanese, our opponent in this war? The situation was essentially the reverse. Japan had been building its military for a decade and in 1941 Japan possessed the largest and most powerful aircraft carrier force in the world. It also had the world's largest and most advanced naval air fleet. The Japanese were also brimming with confidence; and they'd won many quick and decisive victories over the previous few years including a smashing victory at Pearl Harbor in December, 1941. It didn't stop after that; it followed that victory with the seizure over the next few weeks of Thailand, Hong Kong, Guam, and Wake Island. In January, 1942, Japan invaded Burma, the Dutch East Indies, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands. In February, Japan seized Bali, Timor, and Singapore. In March, Japan seized Java. The list goes on and on. Then, on May 6, Japan took the Philippines, which was, of course, a key American possession. This incident, this fall of the Philippines, included the surrender of Bataan, and at Bataan 78,000 American and Filipino troops—this was the largest surrender in U.S. history—surrendered to the Japanese. They were subsequently forced to march to prison camps, a grueling ordeal known as the “Bataan Death March,” which killed thousands.

If you looked at a map in May, 1945, you'd see that Japan controlled a vast swath of the Pacific and East Asia. The U.S., to say the least, faced a formidable task in taking on Imperial Japan. The first major clash in this effort in the Pacific was the Battle of the Coral Sea, and that stretched over the course of May 3–May 8, 1942. In this battle, the United States won a

strategic victory because they managed to stop a large Japanese fleet that was advancing on Australia as part of an invasion. The United States won this battle but suffered heavy losses, but the Japanese lost an aircraft carrier, which is, of course, in naval warfare a big piece; the thing that matters the most. On top of that, they not only lost a carrier, the Japanese were stung by this defeat; they were simply not used to losing these battles (they hadn't lost one in a long time).

In the aftermath of this battle, Admiral Yamamoto, the Commander of the Japanese Combined Fleet, responded with a bold plan: The Japanese would seize the island of Midway, which is about 1,300 miles northwest of Hawaii. At the time, we should point out that Midway was a key U.S. possession, a really strategic point for the military right in the middle of the Pacific that served as an important refueling station for ships and for planes. Japan planned to seize it and then turn it into their own major air and naval base from which they could pretty much control all of the central Pacific. Yamamoto devised essentially a two-part strategy: First, the Japanese navy would stage a diversionary attack on the Aleutian Islands off the coast of Alaska and this would ideally divert the U.S. naval assets up in that direction. As always, it helps to location the Aleutian Islands on a map—I always point this out to my students—that shows the whole Pacific so that you can actually see how close the Aleutian Islands are to the action that we're describing here. A regular flat U.S. map won't do, especially one of those maps that tucks Alaska way down off the coast of Mexico (don't get me started). So that's point one.

Point two—get a diversion going in the Aleutian Islands and then part two of this plan—with some of the U.S. navy occupied up there at the Aleutian Islands, Japan would launch a major attack on Midway, and this would draw in the rest of the United States' fleet, essentially setting a trap for them, whereupon they'd be destroyed. Yamamoto had good reason to be confident. His fleet included four aircraft carriers and, of course, the hundreds of aircraft on them, plus many battleships and cruisers; so he had a large fleet to pull this off. On paper, it was a great plan; and if it succeeded, Japan would enjoy almost total domination of Asia and the Pacific for years to come. But Yamamoto was unaware of two crucial things: First, his plan assumed that the United States had only two operational aircraft carriers in the region near

Midway and that neither of them would play any kind of a major role in the battle. His second assumption, or the second thing that he didn't really know about, was that the American team of cryptanalysts—these are people who decode secret codes—had broken the Japanese communication code. As a result, the American commander in this situation, Admiral Chester Nimitz—he was the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet—knew in advance the details of this Japanese plan. This might remind you of an earlier lecture we did where way back in the Battle of Antietam, remember when some of General McClellan's men found the plans of Robert E. Lee's battle plans. Remember back in 1862, McClellan managed to fritter away this advantage. Not so with Admiral Nimitz.

Nimitz now knew that the attack on the Aleutian Islands was a ruse; so he didn't divert a lot of U.S. naval assets in that direction, he focused on Midway, which he knew was going to be the big offensive. In effect, Nimitz planned to turn the intended Japanese trap designed to destroy the American fleet into an American trap designed to inflict maximum damage on the Japanese; you might think of this as a monumental turning of the tables, exactly what Nimitz had in mind. Nimitz dispatched the carriers *U.S.S. Enterprise* and the *U.S.S. Hornet* to Midway, the very carriers that Yamamoto assumed would not be present. Yamamoto and his commanders were so certain of the brilliance of their plan, they actually conducted very little forward reconnaissance; so they didn't know that these carriers were on the way and literally what was about to hit them. They further didn't know that two days later, the *U.S.S. Yorktown*, another carrier that had been hastily repaired after the Battle of the Coral Sea, was also dispatched to Midway. Now Nimitz had three aircraft carriers in waiting. In other words, Yamamoto's surprise had become Nimitz's surprise.

The Battle of Midway began at 4:30 a.m. on June 4. Vice Admiral Nagumo, the commander of the Japanese carrier group, launched a wave of over 100 planes to bomb Midway Island. He also at the same time sent seven scout planes out across the Pacific to find the American fleet, which he hoped he'd be able to lure them into this devastating trap that they had in mind. The first wave of Japanese planes over Midway encountered almost no resistance at all, and they were able to inflict serious damage on Midway's military installations. At this point, Vice Admiral Nagumo was confident of victory,

and he decided to launch a second and more devastating aerial attack on Midway. This required that he switch things up a little bit: He had to bring out a reserve squadron of aircraft and these aircraft had been equipped with aerial torpedoes that were for attacking ships. In order to make this second attack on the island of Midway, he had to rearm these planes with bombs. This was not an especially difficult task, but it was time-consuming; so for the next hour or so, his men began to take the torpedoes off the planes and began to fit them with bombs.

While this was underway, Japanese scout planes radioed back that they'd found the American fleet. Now Admiral Nagumo had to make a fateful decision. He made the decision, and it made sense given his assumptions about the American fleet; he thought the American fleet was weak. He decided to stop rearming for this second attack on Midway and instead go after the American fleet. This meant that he had to tell the crews that were switching the armaments on these planes that all the bombs they had taken off and torpedoes they had put on, they had to reverse that process, get the bombs back onto the planes; so this was going to take some time. More importantly, this is a really important point here—this is very significant; it's one of those little details in the Battle of Midway that make a huge difference—because of this rapid change of plans, the decks of the major aircraft carriers there were covered literally in ordinance, in bombs and torpedoes; so they were sort of midway in making that change of armaments when out of nowhere a wave of American planes arrived and attacked the carriers. American planes; where did they come from? The Americans had sent scout planes out just like the Japanese had; so long before the Japanese scouts had found the U.S. fleet, American scouts had found the Japanese fleet.

At 7:00 a.m. Rear Admiral Frank Fletcher—he's the senior tactical commander of the fleet—began launching his aircraft in the direction of the Japanese fleet. The first squadrons of American torpedo bombers attacked the Japanese—these were bombers who had come from the *Hornet* and the *Enterprise*—did not score a hit; this mission was actually largely a failure, most of these planes were shot down. But in kind of an inadvertent way, it actually played a key role in the subsequent next phase of the battle. They didn't inflict any damage on the Japanese; but what they did is they sort of caused a panic among the Japanese that the Americans were out there,

and the Japanese air defenses began to concentrate on low-flying torpedo bombers, which they expected more of them to come any moment. They're looking low when way up high, some high-altitude dive bombers, more American planes, which were coming in at a much higher altitude, came in towards the carriers from two different directions. They converged on the three carriers: the *Kaga*, the *Soryu*, and the *Akagi*. Remember, the decks were covered with bombs and torpedoes; and so as the American planes swooped in and dropped their ordinance on these carriers, they weren't only dropping their own bombs at the carriers, the carriers were essentially almost rigged for a chain reaction explosion. When the ordinance hit the carriers, it did indeed cause not only great damage but then subsequent rounds of ammunition continued to go off. All three carriers were crippled in just a matter of moments, and then a few minutes later consumed in flames. Over the next few hours, one by one, the three great aircraft carriers of the Japanese fleet went to the bottom.

That left one remaining Japanese carrier, the *Hiryu*. It launched a counterstrike. Two waves of Japanese planes hit and disabled the *U.S.S. Yorktown*. But, then, a few hours later American dive bombers found the Japanese carrier and managed to sink it; so that meant four Japanese carriers gone to the bottom in the course of that day. Stunned and humiliated, Admiral Yamamoto ordered his fleet to return to its base. A few days later, a Japanese submarine torpedoed and sank the disabled carrier *U.S.S. Yorktown*. This was probably a small bit of consolation to the Japanese military. They had planned—think back what's going on in their minds—a knockout punch at Midway and instead they had suffered effectively a crushing defeat.

How significant was this defeat at Midway? Consider these statistics: The United States lost 1 aircraft carrier—I just mentioned it, the *U.S.S. Yorktown*—one destroyer, 145 aircraft, and 340 sailors killed. For the Japanese, they lost 4 carriers, one heavy cruiser, 228 aircraft, and over 3,000 sailors killed. But there's a lot more to this than just these basic numbers. The 4 aircraft carriers lost at Midway represented the cornerstone of the Japanese navy, and now they only had 2 left. More importantly, these carriers for the Japanese were incredibly hard to replace. Japan had very limited access to raw materials and very limited shipbuilding infrastructure back on the mainland. As a result, Japan only managed to build four more carriers by

war's end. What about the U.S.? The United States still at this point, in 1942, still had 5 carriers that were operational; and, U.S. shipyards were much better equipped and up and running: They would crank out in the next three years 17 carriers by the end of the war. In fact, by 1943, the United States Navy was larger than all the navies of all the combatant nations combined. Just to give you a number on this: By the end of the war, the United States had over 6,700 ships. That is a large navy; that is the largest navy in human history.

What about airplanes? U.S. industry used mass production techniques to build its planes, and pretty much everything else. In contrast, Japan still built their planes one plane at a time. In Germany, they were a little bit more advanced in their construction techniques and they built planes in small batches; but for the Americans, it was assembly line all the way. Consider the American version of aircraft production; exactly how did they pull this off? The Ford Motor Company took a farm that was owned by Henry Ford that he had used in years past to employ youth in the summer, and he turned it in record time into a massive factory—the Willow Run Manufacturing Plant—and it was used to build B-24 bombers. But aircraft, of course, are different and far more complicated than automobiles, so how did they do it? A car had roughly 15,000 parts; a B-24 had 1.5 million parts; so we're talking about a different kind of assembly line. They were up to the task: The assembly line at Willow Run, when they finally put it all together, was over a mile long; and by 1943, workers at this one plant alone—and there were dozens of these plants around the country—were producing 10 planes a day. In all, over the course of the war, United States factories produced 300,000 airplanes, 77,000 ships, 2.5 million trucks, and 20 million small arms for soldiers. It's an amazing amount of industrial might put to military use there. World War II was not just a war of armies and navies, that's the main point; it's a war of industry, of technology, and also financial might. Remember we noted this in our lecture about the Manhattan Project; about the building of the atomic bomb.

What was the significance of Japan's defeat at Midway? First, the devastation of the Japanese carrier fleet ended major Japanese offensive operations in the Pacific for the rest of the war. The initiative in the Pacific War shifted on that day to the Americans; and by August, 1942, U.S. Marines landed at

Guadalcanal, an island in the Solomon Islands chain. This action began and was really the first step in a long and bloody roll back of Imperial Japan. It's at this point that the map of the Pacific begins to show the slow and steady shrinkage of the once far-flung Japanese Empire. If you looked at a map in 1941, they seemed to be expanding outward to take over all the Pacific; now, over the next few years, that map was going to shrink, that area of Japanese empire. This process of rolling back the Japanese Empire involved battles that you've probably heard of before: the Battle of Wake Island, the Battles of Guam and Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and those are just four of dozens of important battles. Clearly, the Battle of Midway was the turning point for the American war effort in the Pacific.

But the Battle of Midway had significance far beyond the Pacific. In the larger picture of the global conflict that was World War II, the crippling of the Japanese navy at Midway allowed the United States to devote the majority of its resources—all that industrial might and all that military and financial power—to defeating Nazi Germany in Europe; and this was called the “Europe First” strategy. Only after Germany surrendered in May, 1945, did the United States then begin its final push against Japan. That ended in August, 1945, with the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the subject of the previous lecture. Midway, in many ways, not only sealed the fate of Imperial Japan, but also Nazi Germany. There were lots of other crucial battles in World War II—the Battle of Britain, the Battle of the Bulge, the Siege of Stalingrad, and D-Day, of course—but really the critical one, the turning point, occurred at Midway in June, 1942.

We have to leave it there in this discussion of the Battle of Midway. In our next lecture, we'll journey to the American suburbs. See you then.

1945 The Land of Lawns—Suburbanization

Lecture 38

America was 90 percent rural in 1820; by 1920, more than 50 percent of the U.S. population lived in cities. The birth of the automobile culture then sparked a movement into suburbs that has not yet abated, thanks to federal government policies that ensured low-cost mortgages, cheap gas, and highway construction. Suburbanization's impact on American culture, race relations, urban policy, energy consumption, and environmental damage cannot be underestimated.

After 1945, America would become the world's first majority-suburban society. But the trend toward suburbanization began in the mid-19th century, at a time when American cities were growing by leaps and bounds. Some Americans exulted in the excitement, diversity, and dynamism of the metropolis; others found the cities filthy, crowded, crime-riddled, and full of “undesirables”—that is, blacks and immigrants.

A number of influential writers and thinkers suggested that if the city was “unnatural,” the solution was to be found in nature, which was pure, clean, restorative, and quiet. Initially, this celebration of nature led to the urban park movement. Later, writers like Andrew Jackson Downing, who was an architect and horticulturalist, began to argue that suburban living was better not only for the individual and his family, but also for the health and vitality of the republic.

The process of American suburbanization has been unique among industrialized nations. In Europe in particular, the suburbs are associated with dismal low-rent housing and poverty, crowding, and crime. Only in the United States do we find an association of wealth with suburbia and poverty with city life.

The first suburbs were made possible by rail transit. Starting in the 1850s, streetcar lines allowed developers to build modest middle-class housing near the city. Steam railroads carried wealthier patrons even further to communities of spacious houses on large plots. The automobile accelerated

this trend as city, state, and federal officials committed billions of dollars to the construction of paved roads.

After World War II, suburbanization exploded. In a way, it resembled immigration: Push factors included rising taxes and rents, declining services, rising crime, declining housing quality, and an influx of black and Latino residents into formerly white neighborhoods. Pull factors included the suburbs' open spaces, the appeal of home ownership over renting, lower property taxes, less crime, better schools, and racial and ethnic homogeneity.

Abraham Levitt & Sons perfected the balloon-frame house, arguably the Model T Ford of housing—cheap, reliable, identical, and built via an assembly line process.

The rush to homeownership was also made possible by cheap land and cheap houses. Levitt & Sons perfected the balloon-frame house,

arguably the Model T Ford of housing—cheap, reliable, identical, and built via an assembly line process. The first “Levittown” was constructed on Long Island in 1947, just 30 miles from New York City. The Levitts built some 140,000 houses by the 1960s, and their methods were widely copied.

Five federal programs in particular helped turn the United States into a suburban nation:

- The Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) refinanced millions of Depression-era loans from 5 or 10 years to the now-standard 20 or 30 years, reducing monthly payments substantially.
- The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) provided mortgage insurance to banks, making loans a less-risky proposition; in addition, the FHA and G.I. Bill subsidized low-cost mortgages for millions of World War II veterans.

- State and federal governments launched massive road and highway construction programs that created a vast transportation infrastructure. Most notable was the Federal Aid Highway Act, which created the Interstate highway system.
- The federal government kept gasoline taxes low. In 2010, Americans paid on average a bit more than \$.040 in taxes on each gallon of gas. Compare this to Canada at more than \$1.00 per gallon and Germany at \$6.30 per gallon. These taxes deliberately encourage the use of public transit. The United States has deliberately discouraged it instead.
- The federal tax code allows home owners to deduct the cost of their property taxes and home mortgage interest. In 2010, this amounted to more than \$100 billion for the mortgage interest deductions alone. Some have called this policy a massive welfare program for the middle class.

Suburbanization has affected American society in profound ways. Suburbanites are more isolated from their neighbors than city dwellers. They commute on average an hour per day. The United States is a nation of homeowners, allowing millions of Americans to accrue billions of dollars in equity.

Social critics argue that suburbs promote monotony and conformity in American life. They have indisputably perpetuated some level of ethnic segregation, contributing to racial tensions. “White flight” has also contributed to a long and devastating urban decline, as people take their tax and consumer dollars to the suburbs. Finally, as Americans have grown more concerned about the environment, more people have recognized “suburban sprawl” as damaging to the environment. ■

Suggested Reading

Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck, *Suburban Nation*.

Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*.

Kay, *Asphalt Nation*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what crucial ways was much of suburbanization driven by a set of federal government policies?
2. Do you agree with the critics who argue that suburbs are boring places of mass conformity, racial segregation, and mindless consumption?

1945 The Land of Lawns—Suburbanization

Lecture 38—Transcript

Welcome back. I'm glad you could be here for another examination of a significant turning point in American history. Today, we look at the origins and impact of the suburban boom after the Second World War.

But first, let's start by putting the story of suburbanization in context. In 1820, the federal census told Americans basically what they already knew: that as a nation, they lived in a nation that was 95 percent rural. The largest city in America in 1820 was New York City with a population of nearly 123,000. Philadelphia ran a distant second at 64,000; Baltimore came in third with 63,000. These were small cities. For the next century, as immigrants poured into the country and the Industrial Revolution took off, the United States urbanized at an unprecedented rate; and in 1920, the census told a different story: The United States was a majority urban nation; that is, more people lived in cities than in small towns or rural areas. Then, at that very moment (1920), a new trend began: movement out of cities and into suburbs. Over the next few decades, especially after 1945, America would become the world's first majority-suburban society. Or put another way, Americans became a society obsessed with lawns. In 2010, cultivated grass lawns surrounding private homes in America covered some 21 million acres. That is an area three-quarters the size of Pennsylvania; that's America's lawns. American homeowners spent an average of 25 hours per year caring for their lawns; if you add that all up, it's three billion hours. How did this happen?

In the course of this lecture on the great suburbanization trend after 1945, we'll focus on four things: First, we'll look at the origins of what we'll call the "suburban ideal." Then, we'll move on to examine early versions of suburbanization that occurred before the invention of the automobile. Then, we'll explore suburbanization, the boom in suburbanization, which occurred after World War II and the many factors that unleashed it. Finally, we'll examine the profound ways in which suburbanization affected American society.

Let's first begin by looking at the origins of what we'll call the "suburban ideal." It began in the mid-19th century; and not surprisingly, it began

at the moment when American cities were growing by leaps and bounds. Americans—some Americans, like the poet Walt Whitman, sort of the poet laureate of urban America—exulted in what he found to be exciting and remarkable; he found cities exciting, diverse, and dynamic, and he wrote some of his greatest poetry about New York. But many Americans found rapidly expanding cities like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia repulsive. Cities, in their minds, were crowded; and they weren't just crowded with lots of people, but lots of immigrants: lots of blacks, lots of people effectively on the margins of society. These people found cities filthy and polluted; full of horse manure, full of trash and poorly-cleaned streets, and so forth. They also found cities crime-ridden, as crime rates began to rise precipitously along with the rise in the size of cities. Cities became also more violent; not just more crime, but more violent: more riots, more crimes against person, murder, rape, and assault, all rising in the middle of the 19th century. Some people didn't like cities because they were so loud and so jarring. All that fast-paced life was just too jarring to their soul, to their psyche; it was just not a place for them. In short, for all these reasons, many Americans deemed the cities unhealthy, unlikeable, and unnatural.

In response to this perceived problem of the modern city, a number of influential writers and thinkers began to offer a solution. If the city was “unnatural” then the solution would be found somewhere in nature. Remember, this is the mid-19th century, the era when Henry David Thoreau was writing his great meditations on Walden Pond. Americans loved nature in the mid-19th century, and it shows up in all kinds of places. When they thought about nature, what did Americans think? They thought about certain qualities. In their mind, nature was pure; it was clean; nature was also restorative—that's where you went to get yourself together, to collect your thoughts, to be restored, particularly if you lived in the city—and also nature was quiet, and it was serene, and it was contemplative; a place where you could think. We see this in literature, and in paintings, and in many, many aspects of American culture in the mid-19th century.

Initially, this celebration of nature led to the urban park movement; in essence, this was an effort to bring nature back into the city, to kind of cure the problems of the city by bringing green grass, trees, and so forth into the city. New York's Central Park, which they began construction on in the 1850s

and was finished really by the late 1860s, was a prime example of this trend and it led to all kinds of imitators. But there emerged in the 1840s and 1850s a group of men and women who were committed essentially to celebrating the private home built outside the city; so they're still loving nature but they're saying, "Bringing nature into the city, that's not good enough. We need to bring people out to the countryside." The foremost advocate of this was a landscape architect and horticulturalist, a man named Andrew Jackson Downing; and he wrote extensively about the superiority of suburban life over city life. Downing wrote, "All sensible men gladly escape, earlier or later, and partially or wholly, from the turmoil of cities." For Downing, the suburban home was not only better for the individual and his family, but also for the health and vitality of the republic. Let's listen to what he wrote:

The love of country is inseparably connected with love of home. Whatever, therefore, leads men to assemble the comforts and elegancies of life around his habitations, tends to . . . render domestic life more delightful; not only augmenting his own enjoyment but strengthening his patriotism, and making him a better citizen.

You can't get much more of an endorsement of suburbanization there. It's not like it'll be nicer for you and better for your soul, but also will make you a better citizen.

We should point out at this point the utterly unique character of American suburbanization. Clearly, Downing and the other advocates of suburban living had wealthy and middle class Americans in mind; and this association of wealth and suburbia has never wavered in the United States. But in the rest of the world, suburbs are associated with poverty, crowding, and crime. Anyone who has ever flown into Paris has seen this in the ride from the airport to the city center. Outside of Paris are miles and miles of drab, high-rise housing projects filled with working-class people. But at the edge of the city, Paris suddenly becomes a region of beautiful, low-rise residential areas inhabited by middle- and upper-class Parisians. In the United States, it is in the city core that we actually find the large ghettos of poor people and it is in the suburbs that we find the wealthiest Americans. In a word, America has done suburbanization inside out. Historian Kenneth T. Jackson, one of the nation's leading scholars of the history of suburbs, has developed a one-

sentence definition of the unique American form of suburbanization. Let's listen to how it goes: "Affluent and middle-class Americans live in suburban areas that are far from their workplaces, in homes that they own, and in the center of yards that by international standards are enormous." That's Ken Jackson's one-sentence explanation of the key elements of suburbanization.

Let's get back to the story of suburbanization. If Downing wanted Americans to move to the suburbs and thought that was the best place for them, how were they to get there? Or, more precisely, how were they to get from their place of work in the city to their suburban residence? The first suburbs were made possible by rails. Starting in the 1850s, streetcar lines began radiating out from urban cores, allowing real estate developers to build modest middle class housing developments. At the same time, steam railroads—we learned about this in our discussion about the Transportation Revolution—began to carry wealthier patrons even further from the city center, out to settlements of more spacious houses on large plots of manicured lawns. Just to give you one example of this: By 1900, to cite one example, 100,000 commuters passed through Grand Central Terminal every day, and almost all these people are coming from outlying suburban areas into the city. The advent of the automobile in the early 20th century, as we noted in our lecture on the Second Transportation Revolution, just accelerated this suburbanization trend. There were 1 million cars on the road by 1913. In 1923, the number jumped to 10 million. Four years later, it crested at 26 million cars. That's one car for every five people in the nation. By then, city, state, and federal officials had committed billions of dollars to the construction of paved roads to accommodate the automobile. The suburban ideal of living in a private home surrounded by a lawn outside of a city was firmly established long before 1945. But it's in this post-World War II era that suburbanization truly exploded.

Now it's time to explore what exactly went into this suburbanization boom after World War II, and what were the key factors that unleashed it? In essence, suburbanization came down to this: The average American after 1945 wanted to live in the suburbs and the federal government made it possible. Why did Americans want to move to the suburbs in such huge numbers after 1945? In a way, let's think of this like immigration: It came down to "push" and "pull" factors. Push factors, you'll recall, make you think

about leaving a place. Pull factors essentially entice you to go to a particular place. In the post-1945 era, the push factors were that Americans associated cities with a series of problems: One was rising taxes and rising rents and a problem of declining services, particularly declining transportation services and declining schools. There was also the problem of a rising crime rate and the declining quality of housing stock. Truth be told, increased numbers of black and Latino residents also became a push factor. At the same time in the post-1945 era, the pull factors were that suburbs seemed to offer open space; home ownership, particularly when compared to renting; low property taxes; low crime; high quality schools; and racial and ethnic homogeneity.

With these general push and pull factors in mind, let's look at some specific factors that propelled suburbanization forward in this postwar period. Let's start with some general economic factors: Even before the end of World War II, the United States had by most measures the world's largest middle class; the largest middle-class nation on Earth. But the middle class grew in size and wealth at an astonishing rate following 1945. Just consider some of these numbers, and this relates to the economic boom that was triggered by World War I: Between 1945 and 1960, Gross National Product rose 250 percent; that is essentially a white-hot economy. Per capita income in this period rose 35 percent. So what did these middle-class Americans do with all this newfound wealth? They bought stuff; lots of it. By 1960, 60 percent of American households owned a car; 70 percent owned a television; and these numbers would continue to go on up. Speaking of households, 62 percent of Americans owned their own house; and this was a major jump from 43 percent in 1940.

This rush to homeownership was made possible not only by rising incomes, but also by two additional economic factors: cheap land and cheap houses. Of course, "cheap" is a relative term, but compared to other industrialized nations like France, England, or Germany, the United States has vast areas of inexpensive land on which to build houses; and those houses that they build on that land, compared to those outside the United States, are relatively inexpensive. This is because the U.S. invented and then perfected what's called the "balloon-frame" house. It's so familiar to us we don't actually realize that most people in other countries don't build their houses out of two by four pieces of wood, and that's essentially what your balloon-frame house

is: building frames, slapping them together, and then putting the walls on, putting the roofs on.

This mention of housing styles in America brings to mind the story of Abraham Levitt and Sons. Abraham Levitt was what I like to call the Henry Ford of middle-class housing. Ford, as we know, did not invent the automobile, but he did invent the Model T, which was a decent, reliable car that millions of Americans could afford. Abraham Levitt essentially created the Model T of houses. It was a four-room, one story, Cape-style house measuring 750 square feet. Each consisted of a living room, a kitchen and dining area, two small bedrooms, and a bathroom; and it was built on a concrete slab, no basement. The house was set on a 60 by 100 foot lot. The price? \$7,990.

It all started in 1947 on Long Island, just 30 miles outside of New York City, on what used to be more than 1,000 acres of potato farms. Levittown, as this massive suburban development was called, was built using mass production techniques that the Levitts had perfected on a series of smaller projects in recent years. What did they do? Like Henry Ford, they established an assembly-line-style construction process with 27 steps. First, teams of men poured the concrete slabs. Then a truck arrived, dropping construction materials at precisely 60-foot intervals. Then crews of men, each man trained to do one task, began to arrive at precisely scheduled intervals; framers, roofers, plumbers, electricians, and so on. As soon as they had finished their job at one house, they simply walked 60 feet to the next house and began to do the same job at the next one. One man whose job it was to caulk windows—put the insulation around windows—was expected to do this for 300 windows per day. By 1948, the Levitts were completing 35 houses a day; 150 houses a week, or, at the peak of production, 1 house every 15 minutes.

You can see why I mentioned that this is like the Model-T of houses; this is mass production of American housing. I think we've all seen those amazing aerial photographs of Levittown or places like it with those endless rows of winding streets and identical houses. Levittown eventually comprised 17,400 houses, all of them the same, and about 82,000 people eventually lived there. The Levitts built a second Levittown outside of Philadelphia in

the 1950s and a third Levittown in southern New Jersey in the 1960s. In all, the Levitts built some 140,000 houses; but their methods—that's a lot of houses; but many, many more houses were built in the postwar area and they were built along the same lines—were widely publicized and many, many people copied this style throughout the nation to build other suburban real estate developments. My favorite line from William Levitt is the way he sort of tied this suburban housing boon to the Cold War era in which it was happening; and he argued that he was not only providing the middle class American with a house he could afford, he was basically saying he was doing America's will in the Cold War. He said, "No man who owns his own house and lot can become a Communist. He has too much to do." I love that because it's true—if you own a house, you're never short of things to do—but in his mind he was putting it in that Cold War context; that this is a way to cure the problem of radicalism in America: Pay them enough to buy a house, and we'll solve that problem.

Now let's turn to federal policy and the role it played in turning the United States into a suburban nation. Essentially it came down to five federal programs: The first was the Home Owners Loan Corporation. Back in the 1930s during the Great Depression, the Roosevelt administration created two programs designed to end a tidal wave of foreclosures and promote housing construction, and one of them was the HOLC (Home Owners Loan Corporation). This program refinanced the loans of millions of Americans by stretching out the life of loans. Up until this time, traditionally home loans ran for just 5 or 10 years, so this meant you had to have a huge down payment, sometimes 50 percent, and then you paid large monthly payments over those 5 or 10 year periods. The new program created by HOLC stretched out loans to now 20 and 30 years and in so doing it reduced monthly payments substantially. The HOLC program made mortgages affordable to millions of Americans for whom homeownership was simply out of reach because of the old way of doing things.

The second New Deal program was FHA, the Federal Housing Administration. In essence, the FHA provided insurance to banks for the mortgage loans that they were issuing; and with the federal government guaranteeing banks that they would be reimbursed if a client defaulted on their mortgage, banks were thus encouraged to lend to a much larger number

of people; people that they normally would have deemed too risky only a few years earlier, now they began to lend money to them because they were guaranteed by insurance. So FHA greatly increased the number of mortgages that banks could issue and HOLC made those mortgages more affordable for millions of Americans. The real impact of these programs, even though they were created in the 1930s, were going to be felt after 1945 when the peacetime economy boomed and 16 million veterans—people who had put on the uniform in World War II—returned to the United States and every one of them was eligible for the GI Bill, a landmark law that included a provision to make these veterans eligible for low-cost home mortgage loans under the FHA plan.

The third major program involved state and federal governments launching massive highway and road construction programs, and this was largely to create a huge transportation infrastructure devoted to the automobile. To be sure, a lot of highway, bridge, and tunnel construction had taken place before World War II—remember how much of those New Deal programs like the WPA were dedicated to road and highway construction—but those efforts, even though they were big, paled by comparison to what followed in 1945. The most notable of these programs was the Interstate Highway Act, which was signed into law by President Eisenhower in 1956. The Interstate Highway Act called for the construction of 41,000 miles of highway, with the federal government paying 90 percent of the costs. One of the leading justifications for the program was national security. Eisenhower said, “In case of atomic attack on our key cities, the road net must permit quick evacuation of target areas.” They were, again, wrapping this in a Cold War context. But the real explanation was more basic: Nearly everyone—auto executives, members of Congress, average citizens—wanted modern highways dedicated to America’s burgeoning car culture. The Interstate Highway System in the early 21st century has now ballooned to 47,000 miles of highway, and this makes it easily the largest public works project in American history, bar none.

Fourth, unlike our European counterparts, the United States chose to keep gasoline inexpensive. This isn’t really a government program so much as it’s a public policy choice by elected officials to impose only modest taxes on gasoline (again, relatively speaking). Just how cheap is American gasoline?

I know you're saying to yourself, "I don't think gasoline's cheap," but it is cheap when we look around the world. In 2010, Americans paid something over \$.40 per gallon in state and federal taxes on their gasoline. That might seem high, but consider taxes in other industrialized nations: In Canada, gasoline taxes add at least \$1 per gallon; in England, gasoline taxes add \$3.50 per gallon; and in Germany, it adds \$6.30 to a gallon, and that's just the tax, not the cost of the gasoline. These countries in Europe and elsewhere long ago decided to encourage their citizens to buy fuel efficient cars and to use public transportation; and, in fact, most of those taxes in Europe on gasoline actually go to supporting a much more expansive public transportation network. That's why the train systems in Europe tend to be a lot better than in the United States. High gasoline taxes thus discourage car usage and help pay for public transportation in Europe; but in the United States, relatively cheap gasoline has had the opposite effect. Americans after 1945 turned their backs on mass transit and cities and basically became a nation of suburban-dwelling automobile drivers. This is why, after 1945, these vast systems of public transportation—streetcar systems that had been built in almost every major American city—many of them were simply dismantled in the 1940s and 50s because they were seen as irrelevant because of the car culture that had developed.

A fifth program involved the federal tax code. The federal tax code in these years allowed homeowners to deduct the cost of their property taxes and the interest on their home mortgages from their federal taxes. Through this program, Congress, which writes the federal tax code, created a huge incentive for private homeownership. Given the size of this tax break—it's about \$100 billion just for the mortgage interest deduction alone in 2010—some critics have called this simple but far-reaching policy a massive welfare program for the middle-class. However you choose to characterize it, there's no question that this policy has played a major role in American suburbanization.

The cumulative effect of these five programs transformed the United States into the world's first suburban nation. By the year 2000, about half the American population—depending on how you define "suburb"—lived in suburbs. In other words, it took several hundred years to become a mostly urban nation by 1920 but only 80 years or so to become mostly suburban.

We should keep in mind that “suburb” is a loosely-defined category, but be that as it may we are indeed a mostly suburban nation.

Finally, let’s examine the profound ways in which this suburbanization trend after 1945 affected American society; or, in keeping with our lecture theme, how suburbanization after 1945 mark a turning point in American history? It goes without saying that suburbanization meant much more than people just living in suburbs rather than cities. Suburbanization has radically reshaped American life in countless ways. Let’s consider, just to start, the suburban lifestyle. It’s become the norm in America to live in a detached house surrounded by a lawn of tailored grass; and speaking of lawns, I gave you two statistics at the start, let’s dwell on a few more: Americans in total spend \$40 billion on lawn care every year; and, in fact, when one considers all the yard care equipment out there—lawnmowers, leaf blowers, and so forth—Americans spill an estimated 17 million gallons of gasoline every summer; that’s what we spill trying to fill our lawn equipment. That’s more oil than the Exxon Valdez disaster of the 1980s, and that’s done every single year.

The suburban lifestyle has also made Americans more isolated from one another. When people lived in cities they naturally had to interact more with their neighbors; people within their own building because they lived in apartment buildings. But in the suburbs, apart from an occasional neighborhood barbeque or party, there just simply is far less interaction between neighbors. Suburbs also turned America into a nation of commuters. The average commuting time in America is about an hour per day and averages about 30 miles, and that’s up from an average of 44 minutes and 18 miles in 1980; so the trend is in the direction of more, longer commutes and more time in the car. Suburbanization has also turned the United States into a nation of homeowners. Since the 1970s, the homeownership rate in America has hovered at about 70 percent, and that’s about twice the rate that you find in Germany, Great Britain, or France. In economic terms, this trend of home ownership has allowed millions of Americans to accrue billions, trillions, of dollars in equity.

But suburbs have also generated a number of disturbing trends; so what are these disturbing trends? For one, social critics at least as far back as the 1950s have decried suburbs as promoting a monotonous sameness and conformity

in American life. Think for a moment of how many movies you have seen that focus on the monotony and conformity of suburban life. Some of these are funny, like “Edward Scissorhands” or “The Burbs,” and others, like “American Beauty,” are quite grim. Some of the social critique of suburbs is also focused on gender. Betty Friedan, in 1960, published the *Feminine Mystique*, a famous book. In it, she said basically that suburbs are smothering women, and she said, “Suburbs are concentration camps for women.” She did not mince words. Another troubling fact about suburbs is that they have contributed to the perpetuation and in many cases the worsening of racial segregation. Indeed, one of the chief motivators behind suburbanization was the fear that developed among white city dwellers in the 1950s and 60s when African Americans and Latinos began moving into their neighborhoods. This unfortunate aspect of suburbanization is sometimes called “white flight.”

Still another troubling effect of suburbanization was a long and devastating period of urban decline. Simply put, when middle- and upper-class Americans left for the suburbs, they took with them their tax dollars. By the late 1960s, most large American cities were experiencing severe financial troubles. As tax revenues declined, cities began to cut back on things like park maintenance, trash collection, policing, and public schools; and this in turn caused cities to become less safe, less livable, and this trend that only accelerated the trend of people moving out to the suburbs. Similarly, suburban migrants also took with them not only their tax dollars but their consumer spending dollars; and as shopping centers and by the 1950s a new feature on the American suburban landscape, the mall, began to appear along suburban highways, retail shopping in urban areas declined dramatically. As a consequence, so too did the sales taxes and the property taxes paid by these retail establishments to city governments; so these things go hand in hand.

The ensuing urban crisis lasted from the 1960s until the 1990s. Finally, in recent years, Americans have grown more concerned about the environment. More and more people have come to see suburbanization—or what these critics prefer to call “suburban sprawl”—as damaging to the environment. They note that suburbanization wipes out forests and wetlands, it consumes huge amounts of building materials, and generates enormous amounts of waste, and it increases demand for more roads and for more cars, which also contributes to the degradation of the environment. Despite these concerns

about suburbanization, it is safe to say that America is as committed to suburban living as it has ever been.

That does it for now. In our next lecture, we'll examine the origins of the Cold War. Thank you.

1948 The Berlin Airlift and the Cold War

Lecture 39

Even before World War II ended, the United States and the Soviet Union argued over the shape of postwar Europe. The Berlin crisis and airlift established the U.S. policy of actively opposing the Soviet Union and the spread of communism. In the coming decades, virtually every U.S. foreign policy decision—from the compassionate to the questionable—was made with the cold war in mind, leading to a massive military peacetime buildup and a number of incidents that narrowly averted nuclear war.

On April 25, 1945, when the Soviet, American, and British armies met at the River Elbe and severed the German army in two, all three governments issued upbeat statements that emphasized their commitment to common purpose. Despite this moment of unity, the U.S.–Soviet alliance would rapidly deteriorate in the coming months and years, ushering in the cold war.

American anti-communist sentiment goes as far back as the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 and the Haymarket Riot of 1886. But it reached a new level after 1917, when the Russian Revolution transformed communism from an abstract ideology into a national government.

From 1920 to 1933, the United States refused to extend diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union. Even after 1933, when Roosevelt recognized the Soviet government, relations worsened, particularly as Joseph Stalin stepped up anti-capitalist, anti-West rhetoric and embarked on a campaign of extermination against Russian farmers who resisted collectivization. The nadir occurred in 1939, when Stalin signed a nonaggression pact with Adolf Hitler.

Three years later, the United States and the Soviet Union became allies against Nazi Germany, and many hoped that the improved relationship would continue after the war.

The United States emerged from World War II powerful and relatively unscathed, with a booming economy. And of course, the United States had the atomic bomb. Meanwhile, the Soviets had suffered enormously, with more than 20 million dead, infrastructure in tatters, and an economy in turmoil.

In June 1948, Stalin blockaded all rail and highway access to Ally-controlled West Berlin. Its 2 million residents now faced the prospect of starvation.

Yet the 10-million-man Red Army occupied nearly all of Eastern Europe. The United States, France, and Great Britain insisted the

Soviets withdraw and let countries like Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria hold democratic elections; this was the plan Stalin had agreed to at Yalta. The Soviet Union refused, insisting that Germany be demilitarized and deindustrialized and that the countries along the Soviet Union's western border be given pro-Soviet governments.

The Truman administration decided on a policy of containment later known as the Truman Doctrine. In essence, it meant using American financial and military power to thwart Soviet expansionism in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The Marshall Plan sent \$13 billion in aid to help rebuild European economies on a Western model, but one by one, Eastern European nations fell to Soviet-backed coups, starting with Hungary in 1947.

Toward the end of World War II, the Allies had agreed to divide Germany into four sections with each controlled by one of the Allies, and to subdivide Berlin into the same four sections. This created a pro-Western zone in the middle of Soviet-controlled Germany. In June 1948, Stalin blockaded all rail and highway access to Ally-controlled West Berlin. Its 2 million residents now faced the prospect of starvation.

President Truman knew that to maintain American credibility, America had to stand up to Stalin's challenge. A military response might trigger World War III, so Truman opted to establish a humanitarian airlift of food, fuel, and supplies to West Berlin. Soon, a nonstop procession of cargo planes was running to and from Tempelhof Airport—one plane every three minutes!

The Berlin airlift, nicknamed “Operation Vittles,” lasted a little over a year, until after Stalin lifted the blockade. It was a success, but it also hardened the resolve of the two adversaries. America was shocked in September 1949 when the Soviets detonated an atomic bomb and when, a month later, communist revolutionaries under Mao Zedong had toppled the pro-American government in China. The cold war was on.

The cold war reshaped America in three significant ways:

- It led to a dramatic militarization of the United States and a permanent standing army.
- It led to a postwar Red Scare—in particular, the communist witch hunts led by Senator Joseph McCarthy—and the looming specter of nuclear war amplified anti-Soviet paranoia and forced progressivism out of mainstream American politics.
- It shaped and guided decades of American foreign policy, putting a permanent end to isolationism and launching a commitment to “make the world safe for democracy.” However, this policy also contained the seeds of international overreach that soon led the United States into an unwinnable war in Vietnam. ■

Suggested Reading

Gaddis, *The Cold War*.

Parrish, *Berlin in the Balance*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why was it deemed so important for the Allies to maintain West Berlin as a democracy, free from Soviet control?
2. How close did the United States and the Soviet Union come to a military clash and possibly World War III during the confrontation over Berlin?

1948 The Berlin Airlift and the Cold War

Lecture 39—Transcript

Hello again; good to see you. We're here once more to explore a key turning point in American history. Today, we look at the beginning of the Cold War, a development that shaped much of American life for nearly half the 20th century.

Let's begin by returning to 1945. On April 25, 1945, Soviet, American, and British troops met at the River Elbe, near Torgau in Germany. Militarily, the event marked the severing in two of the German armies, which was, of course, an important step in defeating the Nazis and ending the war in Europe. But symbolically, it also suggested a strong bond among the allies, one that might endure (hopefully) once the war had ended. All three issued upbeat statements that emphasized their commitment to a common purpose; and as President Harry Truman said, "This is not the hour of final victory in Europe, but the hour draws near, the hour for which all the American people, all the British peoples and all the Soviet people have toiled and prayed so long." Cameras and newsreels caught scenes of soldiers shaking hands and exchanging cigarettes and candy; and eventually a formal photograph—a staged photograph actually—was taken showing the American and Soviet soldiers shaking hands, reaching across a huge crack in the roadbed of a bridge. Yet, despite this hopeful image of unity and brotherhood, the U.S.-Soviet alliance would rapidly deteriorate in the coming months and years, ushering in the period that we know as the Cold War.

But before we delve any deeper into this topic, let's pause to set out some objectives for our lecture today. In the course of this lecture on the coming of the Cold War, we'll focus on four things: First, we'll look at the early history of American anticommunism. Next, we'll assess the state of the world in the aftermath of World War II. Then we'll explore the deteriorating relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union in the late 1940s, culminating in the Berlin Airlift. From here, we'll examine three significant ways in which the Cold War reshaped American life.

Ok, let's get started by looking at the early history of American anticommunism. Many Americans think that anticommunism was born in

the 1940s with the onset of the Cold War, but it actually goes way back into American history. Just consider this reaction to the Great Railroad strike of 1877. This was by Allan Pinkerton, head of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, in response to this massive strike that really terrified Americans. He said:

We have among us a pernicious communistic spirit which is demoralizing workmen, continually creating a deeper and more intense antagonism between labor and capital ... it must be crushed out completely, or we shall be compelled to submit to greater excesses and more overwhelming disasters in the near future.

That's from 1877. This fear of communism only intensified in the coming years. You'll probably remember that it played a key role in lectures on the Haymarket Bombing in 1886 and the Red Scare of 1919–1920. But there was one element of that latter story—the tumult after World War I—that we didn't actually address in that lecture: the American invasion of Russia in 1918. That's right, the United States invaded Russia in 1918; most people don't know this. The United States and its Western European allies were so worried over the Russian Revolution and the rise of the Bolsheviks they created a multinational force and invaded Russia to aid the non-Communist White Russian forces against the Communist Red Russian forces; this was in the civil war that followed the deposing of the Czar. As you might imagine, Soviet-U.S. relations were pretty frosty in the years that followed. From 1918–1933, the United States refused to extend diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union. Relations between the two powers did not improve even after Franklin Roosevelt ended this policy and formally recognized the Soviet Union in 1933. In fact, relations between the two actually worsened as Soviet officials, especially Joseph Stalin, stepped up anti-capitalist, anti-Western rhetoric. Relations worsened still further in the 1930s when America began to learn about Stalin's campaign of extermination against Russian farmers who were resisting his collectivization plans. Relations hit rock bottom in 1939 when Americans woke up to learn that Stalin had signed a “non-aggression pact” with the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler.

But, of course, as we've noted many times, history so often presents us with utterly unanticipated surprises; history is the study of surprises. Just three years later, after Hitler broke this pact that he had signed with Stalin

and invaded the Soviet Union and then declared war on the United States, the United States and the Soviet Union joined together as allies to defeat Nazi Germany. This surprising turn of events necessitated a very careful propaganda campaign within the United States, essentially to explain to the American people why Stalin, who was the villain of recent days, was now suddenly our friend. It's quite remarkable to view this effort in the old government newsreels that played in movie theaters during the war years. If you've ever seen these, you know how they sound: Mr. Official Announcer Man provides the audio, and he refers to Stalin as "Uncle Joe" and they hail the Soviet people for doing their part to defeat Hitler. It's a lot of effort to kind of bring Americans along to see that Stalin's not such a bad guy, at least during the war. Many people were heartened by this thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations and they hoped that the improved relationship between the two powers would remain in place after the war. But, as it turned out, it took just a few months for it to fall apart and for the struggle that we know as the Cold War to commence.

To fully understand the origins of the Cold War, let's turn our attention to the state of the world in the aftermath of World War II. First, the United States emerged from World War II powerful and relatively unscathed. It's true that about 400,000 Americans died in the course of war—a lot of people—but that number pales in comparison to the millions lost by the Allies. Equally important, with the exception of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States suffered almost no damage to its physical infrastructure during the war; and the American economy, after a decade of the Great Depression, was roaring along on all eight cylinders by the war's end. There was, of course, one other thing: The United States had the bomb. We mentioned this in our lecture on the atomic bomb: The American atomic monopoly—which is what people called it in those days—gave the United States a great sense of security. No one, Americans thought, would mess or defy with our plans and our goals for the world in the post-war world because we had the bomb; essentially, they had to behave.

What about the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the war? It was a very different story. The Soviets suffered enormously during the war, both in terms of loss of life—20 million Russians died in the course of that war—and also the infrastructure destruction was enormous, and, in the post-war

years, tremendous economic turmoil. But despite these weaknesses, the Soviet Union had one very important thing going for it: a 10 million-man Red Army that at that time at the end of the war was occupying nearly all of Eastern Europe. This is the place where the early Cold War began.

What happened to cause a rapid deterioration of this relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union in the late 1940s? First, we should pause for a moment to define the Cold War: The Cold War was a struggle for power and influence between the United States and the Soviet Union after 1945. At the heart of it was basically an ideological conflict, a conflict of visions, between capitalist democracy on the one hand and communist authoritarianism on the other. The Cold War never involved direct military confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, but did involve, as we'll see, a huge military buildup and the funding of or intervention smaller conflicts all around the world, places like Vietnam and Afghanistan.

OK, with that definition in mind, let's get to the action in postwar Europe. The United States, with its wartime allies France and Great Britain, insisted that the Soviets, now that the war was over, should remove the Red Army from Eastern Europe and let countries like Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria hold democratic elections, basically as a first step towards becoming capitalist democracies along the lines of Western European nations like England and France. In the view of the allies, this was to be expected; this was part of the plan that Stalin himself had agreed to at a summit at Yalta in the Ukraine during the course of the war. However, Stalin and the Soviet Union had a very different vision; they rejected this idea of leaving Eastern Europe and letting elections take place. They insisted that basically because of the devastation wrought by the Nazi invasion during the war that two conditions had to be met: First, Germany had to be demilitarized and de-industrialized to prevent it from rising again to start another world war. Then second, the Eastern European countries along the Soviet Union's western border, especially the big country of Poland, they must have pro-Soviet governments. Collectively, these Eastern European countries would form a "sphere of influence," and Stalin said, "This is just like what you have, United States; your sphere of influence of friendly countries in Western Europe and in Latin America." Stalin further said that Franklin Roosevelt

and Churchill, who were at the conference at Yalta, had essentially agreed to this desire, agreed to allow Stalin to have this “sphere of influence.”

President Harry Truman—who had become President after FDR died in April, 1945 just before the end of the war—when he heard this he rejected it out of hand; he said to Stalin, “You have to abide by the agreement that you signed at Yalta; the agreement in plain English” (or plain Russian I guess) “said that there should be ‘free and fair elections’ in Eastern Europe.” Truman was kind of a black and white guy. He said there’s no wiggle room here; it is what it is and that’s what has to happen. Very quickly over the next few years, tension between the two rival powers began to escalate; and so did the rhetoric. In February, 1946, Stalin, in a major address, blasted the Western powers and declared that there could be no lasting peace between communism and capitalism. He topped that off by vowing that in just a few years, the Soviet Union would surpass America in military might. Just a few weeks later, the West responded and in so doing a new phrase entered the American lexicon: the phrase the “iron curtain” It came in a speech delivered by former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill—this was the British Prime Minister—and with Harry Truman at his side, they gathered at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri on March 5, 1946. Let’s listen to what former Prime Minister Winston Churchill had to say; a very famous speech:

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in some cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow.

Churchill was sounding the alarm, saying we are letting this “iron curtain” descend across Eastern Europe and on one side is freedom and on the other side is totalitarianism. Very soon after, the Truman administration decided that the best way to deal with a stubborn and, in their minds, expansion-minded Soviet Union was a policy called “containment.” In essence,

“containment” meant using America’s financial and military power to thwart Soviet expansionism anywhere—in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America—and Truman announced this policy on March 12, 1947. Let’s listen to it; it became known as the Truman Doctrine. We’ll just read the key part: “I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.” It was clear to anybody who heard those words that by “armed minorities or by outside pressures” Truman meant communist revolutionaries aided and funded by the Soviets. Only a few weeks later, the Cold War got its name. On April 16, 1947, in South Carolina, the famous financial advisor and presidential advisor Bernard Baruch said in a speech: “Let us not be deceived: we are today in the midst of a cold war.” He’s the first person to put those words into the public ear, so to speak. Journalist Walter Lippmann—who was very famous, particularly in writing about world affairs—soon took that phrase and popularized it by making it the title of a book that was published later that year.

How did the Cold War play out in those early years? Soon after announcing the Truman Doctrine in 1947, Truman sent financial and military aid to Greece and Turkey to resist a communist takeover there. Then, just a few months later, on June 5, 1947, the Truman administration announced the Marshall Plan. This was the famous plan that offered \$13 billion in aid to help rebuild European economies in the aftermath of the devastation of World War II. Then, in 1947, a Soviet-backed coup led to the establishment of a communist government in Hungary; so you can there’s competition for these countries going on. One year later in 1948, a Soviet-backed coup led to the establishment of a communist government in Czechoslovakia. Both sides, the United States and the Soviet Union, were competing for control and for influence in Europe.

The emerging struggle between the two great powers soon began to focus in one place in particular: this was Germany. Towards the end of World War II, at a conference in Potsdam, the Allies had agreed to divide Germany—which they saw as really the main cause of the war, the main problem—into four sections. Each one of these sections would controlled by one of the Allies. They furthermore divided the capital city, Berlin, into four zones,

each occupied by one of the Allied powers. But to make things a little bit complex, unfortunately Berlin was not located on the borderline of these zones, it was actually located in the middle of the Soviet zone. If you look at a map from 1946, you can see very clearly, usually marked out in different colors, the zones occupied France, Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union. But if you look at a map just two years later, you can see evidence that the tensions that were rising between Stalin and Truman and the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as the Allies, had led the Allies to merge their zones into a single occupation zone; so now you had the three making one zone and the Soviet Union holding on to their zone. In June, 1948, Stalin responded by blockading all rail and highway access to the ally-controlled West Berlin. Remember, Berlin's sitting in the middle of the Soviet zone; it's a little island of Allied control in the middle of this Soviet zone. This meant that two million West Berliners now faced the prospect of starvation; and what Stalin wanted to do here was he wanted to force the Allies to basically give up West Berlin, this little Western outpost in the middle of his controlled part of Germany.

President Truman now faced, clearly, a moment of truth. He knew that to maintain any shred of American credibility in the world, it was essential the United States would stand up to Stalin's challenge in Berlin. But how? A military response might trigger World War III; nobody wanted that so soon after World War II. So Truman opted to establish essentially a humanitarian airlift of food, fuel, and supplies to West Berlin. Truman knew that this still might trigger World War III because Stalin had the option now to shoot down those planes. But he believed that Stalin would want to avoid the negative publicity that would come with shooting down planes full of food, water, medicine, and so forth; so he's pretty confident he would be able to land those planes. But just in case, Truman made a very public announcement that a squadron of B-29s had been moved from the United States to England; and at that time, everybody knew what B-29's were for. Everybody knew that they were the only planes that could carry atomic bombs; so it's kind of a veiled threat to the Soviet Union, "You better let these planes land in this Berlin humanitarian effort because we have the bomb right on your doorstep."

Soon, a nonstop procession of cargo planes began landing at Tempelhof Airport in West Berlin; one plane landing every three minutes. This was the Berlin Airlift; people nicknamed it “Operation Vittles,” largely because it was primarily supplying food. It lasted almost a year; and it finally ended basically when Stalin relented. He gave up, and lifted the blockade. It was a spectacular success, and from the standpoint of the policy of containment. The Americans saw Stalin trying to increase his power in a particular region to spread communism, to take over West Berlin, and they had thwarted that. But the incident also—the incident of the Berlin crisis—basically served to harden the resolve of the two adversaries. It convinced the Allies that the future security of Western Europe required an economically and militarily revitalized Germany; just the opposite of what Stalin wanted. Accordingly, France, England, and the United States ended their occupation of Germany and in May, 1949, they created the Federal Republic of Germany. Right about this same time, the United States led the formation of something called “NATO,” the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This was essentially a military alliance between 10 Western European nations, plus the United States and Canada. The Soviets responded to these efforts by creating a communist East German state, which they named the German Democratic Republic. The Cold War was on.

But then came the shocker; the first of a series of shocking incidents, at least from the United States’ perspective. In September, 1949, the Soviets detonated an atomic bomb. As we’ve noted, the one thing that allowed many Americans and their elected leaders to sleep at night in this time period was the knowledge that the United States effectively had an ace in the hole: the atomic bomb. They knew that they could use it, or at least threaten to use it, to keep the Soviet Union in line; and now that wonderful bit of security was gone. To make matters worse, the United States soon determined that pro-Soviet spies in the United States and in Great Britain had helped the Soviets acquire some of the scientific secrets that they needed to develop the bomb; so they had gotten the bomb, that’s bad enough, but it turned out maybe and, in fact, truly people within the United States had helped them get that, suggesting there was a spy network at work. Then, even before the American people had time to get used to the idea of a nuclear Soviet Union, they awoke in October, 1949—just one month later—to another shocker: Communist revolutionaries under Mao Zedong had toppled the pro-U.S.

government in China; so China, this large country, had now become China. People took to coloring maps in those days with red, and there was really a sense that the globe was going red. And so it went on.

In 1950, communist North Korea started the Korean War by invading non-communist and pro-Western South Korea; another moment of truth for Harry Truman. He responded by forming an international military coalition that invaded Korea and eventually, at great cost, pushed the North Koreans out of South Korea and restored South Korea as an independent pro-Western country. In the mid-1950s, the United States detonated its first hydrogen bomb. Soon thereafter, the Soviet Union detonated their hydrogen bomb. In 1954, the United States deepened its involvement in a little-known country facing a communist insurgency: Vietnam. In 1956, the Soviets responded to a pro-democracy movement in Hungary by sending in their military. And so it went; you get the idea: each side competing for power, for influence in different regions of the world. We could keep going in detailing the key events of the decades-long Cold War, but we'll do this in subsequent lectures on the Vietnam War and also on the fall of the Berlin Wall.

So now, with the Cold War firmly established in the wake of the Berlin Airlift, let's examine the three significant ways in which the Cold War was a turning point that reshaped America. The first major impact of the Cold War was a dramatic militarization of the United States. As we've noticed at several points in earlier lectures, from its very beginnings as a country all the way up to 1950, the United States remained committed to keeping its peacetime military force small. This policy was not about saving pennies; rather, this was based on the long-standing republican principle that argued against large "standing armies." This goes way back into American history. As the argument went, large standing armies always led to tyranny because inevitably, if you have a big army, a Caesar or a Napoleon will come along and seize control and then use that army to make himself dictator. So America entered every war before 1950 with a tiny military and then had to scramble to build a war machine, then win the war, and then as soon as every war was over we dismantled the military once again down to prewar size. This is basically what happened after World War II. Military spending in 1940 was about \$1.6 billion. In 1945, it had soared to \$82 billion. Then, almost immediately, once the war was over, it began dropping; by 1947, it

was down to \$13.1 billion. But in the wake of the Berlin crisis, Truman's National Security Council drew up a document known as NSC-68.

NSC-68 in essence argued that the only way to counter Soviet aggression was a massive increase in defense spending. As they were considering its implementation, the Korean War broke out; so while they're thinking about this possibility of spending as a way to thwart the Soviets, the Korean War broke out. This incident convinced officials that communism was on the march and they had better implement NSC-68. By 1953, the American military budget had tripled in size in just three years, from \$141 billion in 1950 to \$442 billion in 1953. It dipped a little bit after the Korean War, but from this point forward on up to the present day the United States would maintain a massive standing army—obviously involving Navy and Air Force as well—on up until the present day, and we can trace this right back to the beginnings of the Cold War. This was what President Dwight D. Eisenhower was saying in his farewell address, probably the only line people remember; his line was: "Beware the military-industrial complex." This was a military man saying this; but it's kind of a modern version of the standing army problem: that if we have a massive military, we'll need a massive complex, corporations and lobbyists and things, which will go with that. We need to be careful about that; that may threaten the republic.

On a related front, not only did the United States break with its past by committing to a massive standing army, it also broke with its past by joining a permanent military alliance. Remember way back to George Washington's farewell address in 1796. He said, "It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world." In other words, and people sometimes summarize this by saying, the United States should avoid "entangling alliances"; they're a danger to the republic. That was true of most of American history; but by the late 1940s, in response to the perceived threat of a powerful and aggressive Soviet Union, the United States formed NATO, which we mentioned earlier, and became the lead member of that organization.

The second major impact of the Cold War was on domestic life. It would be an understatement, to say the least, to say that the Cold War exerted a profound influence on domestic life in the United States. The most obvious

example of this, of course, is the Red Scare from the mid-1940s through the mid-1950s. Americans in this period grew so fearful about basically what they perceived to be an international communist conspiracy that they began to suspect that their country was filled with Soviet spies, or at the very least Soviet sympathizers. Truth be told, we now know—historians have gotten access to the records—that there were Soviet spies at work in America, and we now know that some of them succeeded in passing information on to the Soviets, particularly about U.S. nuclear weapons programs. But the actual number of spies was quite small. Yet at the time, fear of spies ran so high that pretty much anyone with a strong liberal or progressive political leaning was suspect and frequently called before investigating committees.

The most famous investigating committee—or I guess some people might say the most infamous committee of this sort that carried out these investigations—was the House Un-American Activities Committee, sometimes called HUAC. In 1947, it launched an investigation of Hollywood and the entertainment industry, basically to ferret out what they thought were communist subversives who might be weaving subtle leftist communist messages into films that would then infect American minds. Hundreds of witnesses were called before the committee. Some, like actors Ronald Reagan and Gary Cooper, arrived as what they called “friendly” witnesses; people who were willing to provide answers and information about leftist activity in Hollywood. Other actors, like Orson Wells and Charlie Chaplin, appeared as “unfriendly” witnesses; they refused to name names and provide any information about alleged communist sympathies among their fellow actors and directors. Many people in this latter category, these “unfriendly” witnesses, would be blacklisted and basically their careers would be ended. Under this kind of pressure, Hollywood studios went out their way to produce movies with explicit anticommunist messages. There’s one called “I Married a Communist” from 1950, and another one, “The Red Menace,” from 1949, just to give you two representative ones. Even movies that had nothing to do with politics often included anticommunist messages. The Disney comedy “The Shaggy Dog” from the 1950s: This is basically a kids’ comedy; it’s a hilarious story about a boy who keeps for some reason turning into a dog, usually at inopportune times like at school or at a dance. But then right at the end of the film, this boy ends up exposing a communist spy ring

operating in his own small town; this gives you an idea of how these themes were weaved into a lot of pop culture.

Other investigations were carried out by local, state, and federal governments during these years. In all, about 6.6 million Americans were investigated by the mid-1950s; and out of this number, about 500 were fired from their jobs and about 6,000 were pressured to resign. One of the key figures in this period was an obscure Senator from Wisconsin named Joseph McCarthy. In 1950, at a speech he gave, he announced that the federal government—including key agencies like the State Department and the Department of Defense—were, in his words, “riddled” with hundreds, perhaps thousands of communists. For the next four years, 1950–1954, Joseph McCarthy held center stage in the search for communists, and he staged televised hearings and basically launched an ever-widening circle of accusation and innuendo. McCarthy eventually went too far and he was censured by the Senate and he really faded from the scene pretty quickly after 1955. But by this time, the culture of fear and suspicion in American life had been firmly established.

Another dimension to this Cold War culture of fear was the looming specter of nuclear war; and to show you how real that fear was, I want to play for you a clip from a newsreel from the period in which the government is encouraging people to go out and construct their own bomb shelters. Let’s have a listen.

Do-it-yourself fallout shelters. This above-ground model at Thomasville, Georgia and a basement model at Wheaton, Maryland are open for public inspection. Both are basically the same as to interior construction and décor. Both are designed and built by the government to specifications any around-the-house handyman can easily cope with. All the details are in a civil defense pamphlet. The family fallout shelter: blueprints for survival in this age of atomic peril.

Wow, that’s pretty surreal, right? We might laugh at that or thinking about “family fallout shelters”; we also might laugh when we see pictures of schoolchildren performing the famous “duck and cover” exercises from the 1950s and the 1960s, this allegedly as a means for surviving a Soviet

nuclear attack. But at the time—we always have to bring ourselves back into that time period—these scenes reflected genuine fear among the American people; a fear that their world that they lived in would be wiped out without any warning by a thermonuclear strike.

We also see a major impact of the Cold War in the way it shaped and guided American foreign policy. On the one hand, the Cold War reaffirmed the United States' commitment to internationalism. Just as President Woodrow Wilson—the originator of American internationalism—said in 1917 that the U.S. had an obligation to “make the world safe for democracy,” American presidents from the 1940s on would commit the United States to protecting as much of the world as possible from communist takeover. There's no more vivid expression of this idealistic commitment than the 1961 inaugural address of President John F. Kennedy. Let's listen—and listen very carefully—to a famous passage from that address:

Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage—and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world. Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

As noble as these words are, they also contain the seeds of international overreach. Notice Kennedy's use of the word “any,” as in “any price” and “any burden.” This notion that America could and should spare nothing in its quest to thwart international communism would soon lead the United States into an unwinnable war in Vietnam.

As you can see, we've started to get ahead of ourselves a bit. We'll soon pick up this discussion of the Cold War in our lectures on Vietnam and on the fall of the Berlin Wall. But until then, our next lecture will take us to the invention of television. See you soon.

1950 Tuning In—The Birth of Television

Lecture 40

Radio brought music, soap operas, and news, not to mention advertising of national brands, into 75 percent of American homes by the late 1930s, creating a kind of American mass culture for the first time. But it was radio's successor, television, that had the greatest and longest-lasting impact, reshaping American culture like nothing that came before.

The first television broadcast in history took place on September 27, 1927, but it would be decades before television became a part of mainstream American life. Commercial radio was the medium of the 1920s, and created the template the television industry, a commercial enterprise based in selling advertising.

Morse's invention of the telegraph and Bell's invention of the telephone set many people in the late 19th century to thinking about the transmission of images as well as sound. The challenge was to break down an image so that it could be transmitted and then reassembled by a receiver.

The first tentative steps toward this goal came from a German inventor named Paul Nipkow, but he never built a working model. In 1921, an American high school student named Philo T. Farnsworth drew up the first plans for a camera that used linear image dissection. After a chance meeting with financier George Everson, Everson set Farnsworth up with the lab where, in 1927, Farnsworth's plans became reality.

Soon after Farnsworth demonstrated his invention for the press, RCA, the powerful radio corporation, attempted to sue Farnsworth for patent infringement, even though RCA's engineers never built a working system. Then the company tried to buy the patent off of Farnsworth. Finally, in 1939, RCA and Farnsworth agreed to a licensing deal worth \$1,000,000.

Farnsworth was more than an inventor; he was a visionary and an idealist who believed television would transform human existence for the better. He

thought it had the potential to become “the world’s greatest teaching tool.” Unfortunately, the early years of television were a disappointment to him.

The demands of WWII put the budding television industry on hold, but in 1945, the Federal Communications Commission began licensing television stations and networks. The networks, which created programming and sold it to affiliate stations across the country were speculative ventures by radio network giants.

A number of the earliest developments in television programming are still standards today. In 1946, NBC broadcast the first major sporting event, the Joe Louis/Billy Conn fight from Yankee Stadium. In 1947, it pioneered the evening news program, then introduced variety shows in 1948 with Milton Berle and the *Texaco Star Theater*. Some of the most famous ad campaigns were born during this period as well.



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By the mid-1950s, over half of American households owned a television, and many of the shows we know as classics were being broadcast. Television was well on its way to becoming the central medium of American culture.

In 1954, television surpassed radio as the leading medium for advertising. Many of television's classic shows premiered in the 1950s, such as *The Tonight Show* (1954), *I Love Lucy* (1951), and Edward R. Murrow's *See It Now* (1951). In 1955, 56 percent of American households had a television. By 1962, it was 90 percent.

Television went on to affect almost every aspect of American life. One of its greatest effects was on politics. Increasingly, it mattered not only what a candidate said but how he looked saying it. Television changed the way politicians behaved (the ever-present danger of scandal) and how they spoke (the emphasis on sound bites). The rise of cable television has spawned a vast industry of political punditry and commentary that wields an enormous influence on the opinions of voters and the actions of politicians to this day.

Television also allowed the larger American public to witness war, in real time and unedited, for the first time in history. By the time Vietnam became a massive military operation in 1966–1967, nearly every American household had a television. It allowed Americans to form their own opinions of the war and the American commitment to it.

On a lighter but still significant note, television transformed popular culture. The advent of television transformed professional sports into multi-billion-dollar enterprises. Elvis Presley's performances on *The Ed Sullivan Show* made rock 'n' roll seem safe and helped it enter the mainstream. Television created shared national experiences, from the tragedy of the Kennedy assassination to the triumph of the Apollo 11 Moon landing.

Television has also wielded a powerful influence over issues of race and gender in American life. Initially, TV reinforced traditional notions of gender and race. But over time, television's portrayals of women, African Americans, and gays and lesbians have changed dramatically, reflecting the impact of various civil rights movements.

Many critics decry America's obsession with television, claiming that it fosters isolation, glamorizes violence, and promotes consumerism, among other issues. But for good or for ill, television's arrival in the 1950s caused deep and dramatic changes in American society—and it still does. ■

Suggested Reading

Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty*.

Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why do most Americans know the names of the people who invented the telephone, phonograph, light bulb, airplane, and so on, but few can name Philo T. Farnsworth as the inventor of the television?
2. What is the significance of television in creating and shaping a mass culture?

1950 Tuning In—The Birth of Television

Lecture 40—Transcript

Welcome back. It's time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Today, we look at the birth of television in the 1950s.

Let's start with a story. It's September 7, 1927 in the city of San Francisco. Several men and one woman have gathered in a small laboratory to watch a scientific demonstration. Everyone was in one room, except for one man. He was in a separate room, holding a piece of glass tile on which was scratched a straight line. He placed it in front of a special piece of equipment, and while the others in the next room stared intently at a little screen, it suddenly appeared: the line on the screen. It was somewhat foggy, the image, but the line was clear enough; and most astonishing, they could see the line move as the man in the other room rotated the tile 90 degrees. They were stunned by what they were seeing. "There you are," said the inventor, "electric television." These few people had just witnessed the first demonstration of television; and one of the men in the room was especially excited. He'd provided most of the funding for all this research into this thing called "television," and so as soon as he left the building he fired off a telegram to another investor. It had just four words: "The damned thing works!" Television, the medium that would several decades later change everything, had been born.

Before we go any further into this incredible story of the birth of TV, let's set out our objectives for this lecture. We'll focus on four things: First, we'll look at the story of the invention of the television; that is, the invention of the device we call the "television." Next, we'll examine how television as an industry began to develop in its early years. Then we'll explore the explosion of the TV in the 1950s. Then, finally, we'll examine the profound impact that television has had on American life since that time.

Ok, let's start by first looking at the story of how the television was invented. Let's start out by thinking about what the television actually meant in terms of technology. In essence, the TV represented the merging of three relatively new technologies; new in the early 20th century anyway: motion pictures, sound recording, and radio. All three of these were developed in the late-19th/

early-20th century, and they brought three distinct things: Motion pictures, invented in France in the 1890s, allowed for the capturing of moving images. Sound recording, the phonograph was invented in 1877, allowed for the capture of sound. Then radio—there are so many competing claims about who invented the radio, let’s just say the 1890s—allowed for “broadcasting”; just like the word says, it allowed the “casting” over a broad expanse of material over the airwaves. Of these three technologies, radio was clearly the most significant.

Commercial radio developed in the 1920s, and in so doing it created basically a template for the creation of the television industry 25 years later. Radio really started as a commercial enterprise in 1919. Just a short 10 years later, more than 10 million homes had a radio. As radio became a commercial enterprise, it began selling advertising; so here we’re seeing the template unfolding that we’ll see later with TV. Radio was also privately run but subject to government regulation; and it soon became dominated by a handful of powerful networks. These networks developed a wide range of programming that included news, sports, music, comedy, children’s programming—remember “The Lone Ranger,” you may have heard before—soap operas, political coverage, and religious programming. By the 1930s, the radio had become a central fixture in American life and it had begun to create a “mass culture,” knitting the country together, making America smaller; creating shared information, shared tastes, shared ideas, and shared experiences.

But even as this was happening, a new and even more revolutionary device was in the works: television. So where did television come from? Let’s go back to the 19th century. Morse’s invention of the telegraph in the 1830s and Bell’s invention of the telephone in the 1870s set many people in the late 19th century thinking about the eventual transmission of images over distances. The first tentative steps towards developing the technology that could accomplish this came from a German inventor named Paul Nipkow. Essentially, the challenge was to find a way to break down an image by scanning it and then taking that information and transmitting it—Nipkow thought initially that this would be done along telegraph wires—and then reassembling it on the other end in some kind of a receiver. Nipkow invented a camera that featured a spinning disk with holes on it, and as light passed

through the holes it collected tiny bits of information about the image that was in front of it and then transmitted that information to a piece of photosensitive material called selenium. This idea just scratched the surface of what was needed, essentially trying to find a way to break down an image into small bits of information that could be then sent through a medium and reassembled by a receiver; and Nipkow never actually built a working model. He's on to the theory, but not much beyond that. But in the years that followed, many others in different countries would try to develop image transmission technology, and they all basically started with using Nipkow's disk. As it turned out, however, this method took them down the wrong path.

This leads us to a man named Philo T. Farnsworth. Who? Some British aristocrat who's going to fund television? No. Philo T. Farnsworth was an American, and he was born in a log cabin in Utah in 1906. He was the son of Mormon farmers and he grew up in very modest circumstances. At age 12, the family moved to Idaho; and it was only then at this point in his life that he lived in a house that actually had electricity. From an early age, Farnsworth showed great skill with mechanics; he loved to take things apart and reassemble them; and in school, not surprisingly, he excelled in math and in science. In 1921, at age 15, he told his chemistry teacher that he had an idea about a device that would allow the transmission of images in the same way that radio transmitted sound; and he even drew up the scheme on a piece of paper to show this teacher. The key idea in this device that he had in mind was that his device would scan horizontally—not in a circle like Nipkow's disk—and Farnsworth would call this “linear dissection.”

Farnsworth soon headed off to college; and then his father died, so he had to drop out of college; and for the next two years he did a variety of jobs to support himself and his mother and his family. This eventually led to a chance meeting with a wealthy man from California named George Everson. Farnsworth told Everson at one point about this idea he had for television, and Everson was so impressed that he decided to fund his research. He brought him to San Francisco, set him up in a loft apartment as a lab, and Farnsworth set to work. Two years later, Farnsworth had built what he called the “linear dissection device,” essentially a special camera that scanned images to break them down into horizontal lines and then transmit that information to a

receiver—this receiver is what we eventually call the “TV”—and then that receiver would reassemble the images from these lines.

His first demonstration was the one we described in the introduction to this lecture, the one where he transmitted the very simple image of a single line. You’ll remember that when he did this demonstration, as George Everson put it in his telegram, the damn thing worked. Soon thereafter, Farnsworth filed a patent claim on what he called “electronic television.” The next year, 1928, Farnsworth demonstrated his television prototype to some journalists; and this time he was able to do more things: He transmitted clips from the recent movie *The Taming of the Shrew*; the part that he showed was the famous actress Mary Pickford combing her hair. He also showed a clip from the famous Jack Dempsey-Gene Tunney fight; and he transmitted some images, some graphics, including a dollar sign that he later said was to please Mr. Everson to show him that eventually this thing in which he had invested so much money was going to make some money. In 1929, he transmitted his first live images; so you can see the progression that’s taking place.

By 1930, however, Farnsworth had drawn the attention of RCA, the Radio Corporation of America, a very, very powerful corporation; and they, RCA, were in hot pursuit of their own television technology. The president of RCA, the legendary David Sarnoff, immediately filed a suit against Farnsworth, and in the suit he claimed that Farnsworth had infringed on a patent filed by an engineer who had filed it years earlier, and this engineer now worked for RCA; so they’re basically saying Farnsworth’s idea was stolen from this guy. In this case, the patent office had hearings to see who had the rightful claim; and in the hearings, RCA’s engineer—who filed this patent way back in 1922—was unable to show that his proposed device worked. Farnsworth, when he testified, not only showed that his device did work, but he also brought out his old chemistry teacher to testify that he had shown him the idea way back in 1921; and for good measure, the teacher produced the drawing that showed he had this theory in mind and the drawing was remarkably similar to what he actually produced. Farnsworth won the right to the patent. RCA and Sarnoff did not give up. They next tried to buy the patent for \$100,000, and Farnsworth refused. This is usually where you hear about inventors making a dumb decision and giving away their patent; in this case, Farnsworth was a smart guy. He wanted a licensing deal that

would pay him royalties on the patent. Sarnoff, used to getting his way, allegedly said, “RCA does not pay royalties. We collect them.” RCA tried more legal maneuvers over the next few years, but in 1939 Sarnoff gave in and he agreed to a licensing deal worth \$1,000, 000; so Farnsworth’s gamble paid off.

We should pause here to note that Farnsworth was more than just an inventor; more than just a science guy. He was a visionary and an idealist, and he really believed that television would transform human existence for the better. Let’s listen to one of his biographers, a man named Evan Schwartz, who wrote a wonderful biography of Farnsworth; how he described this vision that Farnsworth had about the amazing properties and value that TV would bring to human civilization:

Above all else ... television would become the world’s greatest teaching tool. ... [Which, of course, is what we’re doing right here.] Illiteracy would be wiped out. The immediacy of television was the key. As news happened viewers would watch it unfold live; no longer would we have to rely on people interpreting and distorting the news for us. We would be watching sporting events and symphony orchestras. ... Television would also bring about world peace. If we were able to see people in other countries and learn about our differences, why would there be any misunderstandings? War would be a thing of the past.

He’s a visionary; and unfortunately, for Farnsworth anyway, he would end up utterly disillusioned by the way television turned out. But we’ll get to that later.

Let’s get back to the story: RCA eventually settled its dispute with Farnsworth, and they soon began the production of television sets using this technology. These TVs, if you’ve ever seen them, came with tiny little screens; but they were very, very popular. By the end of 1942, the number of television sets in America topped 5,000, which is still a tiny number; but there were only a handful of stations out there, all of them were located in big cities, they only broadcast for a few hours a day, so it’s kind of a fringe product at this point. The quality, of course, was really poor. Just to give

you an example: The cameras—television cameras in those days—required intensely hot, bright lights and they would distort a human being’s features; so the actors in those days had to wear green makeup and black lipstick. If you’ve ever seen a photograph of an actor in this kind of getup, it’s pretty horrifying; but on TV they looked more human that way because of the bright lights. But anyway, the demands of World War II, when World War II broke out, put the budding television industry on hold.

Now that we’ve invented the machine called “television,” let’s examine how television developed into a budding industry in its early years after the war. In 1945, as soon as the war was over, the FCC (the Federal Communications Commission) began issuing lots of licenses to new television stations. The following year, the first TV network was formed; this was the Dumont network. It was followed by NBC in 1947, then CBS and ABC in 1948. These enterprises had been broadcasting TV, but not as networks. Now, as networks, they were going to create programming and then sell this programming to affiliate stations around the country. These networks were, to be truthful, at this point speculative ventures by radio giants. This is a lot like if you think back to the 1990s when newspapers began to venture onto the Internet; began to create website versions of their newspapers. Same thing: They weren’t sure if they were going to make any money or if it’s going to be the next big thing; they’re just making sure. The number of TV viewers as late as 1948 was really small. By that year Americans had purchased 800,000 televisions, but this was still a high-priced, luxury item for most people.

However, things were changing: As with all new technology, the quality began to rise and the price began to fall. Looking back on this period, we can see a number of developments in early TV programming that would soon become standard. In 1946, NBC, with Gillette as a sponsor, broadcast the first major sporting event: the Joe Louis versus Billy Conn fight from Yankee Stadium. Joe Louis won that fight in the 13th round by knockout and it drew a very large audience. In 1947, NBC, with Gillette and Ford as sponsors, broadcast the World Series for the first time. This was a seven-game series between the Yankees and Dodgers, which, of course, the Yankees won; and it’s also the first World Series that featured Jackie Robinson. Also in 1947, NBC began airing a pioneering news program in the evening; it was

called the “Camel News Caravan” and it featured an anchorman named John Cameron Swayze. It lasted only 15 minutes and during the whole time—to give you an idea of the different world this was—a Camel cigarette sat burning in his ashtray on his desk; a sort of product placement from the 1940s. CBS soon added “Television News with Douglas Edwards”; so news programming now was becoming standard. In 1948, NBC debuted the “Texaco Star Theater” with comedian Milton Berle as the host. The variety show was an immediate hit and by the end of the year, if you can believe this, Berle commanded an astounding 90 percent of viewers in his weekly Tuesday night spot. Little wonder that people called him “Mr. Television.” In fact, the network delayed the news of the election returns in the famous Dewey versus Truman presidential race that year until the program was over, and only then did they begin to report the results. That same year, CBS started their own variety show called “Toast of the Town,” and this was hosted by some guy named Ed Sullivan.

I should point out that all programming up to this point, including advertising, was done live; and some of the most famous ad campaigns from this period were born. Timex, for example, started its famous “Timex: It takes a licking and keeps on ticking” slogan way back in the 1940s, and these ads frequently had the hosts subject their watches to all sorts of torture tests right there on live TV, dropping a watch, for example, in a paint mixer and then pulling it out 20 seconds later to see that it still was ticking. Cigarette companies were major advertisers. Some of you may have seen at least a photo and maybe even a moving image of probably one of the most famous ads in this period of dancing packs of Old Gold cigarettes dancing across the stage. Cigarette ads, by the way, were eventually banned from TV 1971.

Now let’s see how television exploded in the 1950s. In 1948, as we’ve said, TV was still in its infancy. Radio dominated broadcasting and, most importantly, it commanded the great majority of the advertising dollars. Many people were still wondering if TV was just a fad. In fact, just a few years earlier, somebody was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, “TV will never be a serious competitor for radio because people must sit and keep their eyes glued on a screen; the average American family hasn’t time for it.” But things began to change very quickly. First, television sales skyrocketed into the millions. Second, in 1949, advertisers bought five times the amount

of advertising from the year before. They'd noticed not only the rise in TV sales; they'd also noticed the fact that TV was different from radio in one important way: People sat and watched because it was both audio and video. This was in contrast to what the speaker from the *New York Times* had said: They actually did sit down and listen and watch. This was unlike radio, where you could walk around and do laundry and such while you were listening to the radio; you had to really focus on TV. Maybe they thought ad dollars would get more bang. By 1951, Americans owned 12 million TV sets; this was up from just three years earlier 800,000. That same year, color TV debuted. In 1954, television surpassed radio as the leading medium for advertising; so all these advertising dollars began to move and then move quickly over to the TV side. Nobody by the mid-1950s was calling TV a fad anymore.

It's in this period in the 1950s that we see the introduction of many, many TV classics. "The Today Show" was started in 1952. "The Tonight Show" started in 1954. Sitcoms: "I Love Lucy," "Father Knows Best," "The Honeymooners," "Leave It to Beaver." In drama, we saw the introduction of "Gunsmoke" as well as "Dragnet." The first game shows—these shows that would be the subject of great controversy in the late 1950s—"The \$64,000 Question" and the show "Twenty-One." Famous kids' shows, like "Howdy Doody," "Captain Kangaroo," and "Mickey Mouse Club" in 1955. News programs, some of which are still around: "The Huntley Brinkley Report" in 1956 aired on NBC; Edward R. Murrow's "See It Now" in 1951; and then a few years later, "CBS News with Walter Cronkite" in 1962. In 1955, 56 percent of American households had a TV; by 1962, 90 percent of American households had a TV. TV was definitely here to stay.

How did the arrival of TV constitute a significant turning point in American history? It would be hard to overstate the impact of TV on American society. By 1962, as we noted, there's basically a TV in every household. What did it do, besides eat up a lot of time? One of its greatest impacts was—and this was felt almost immediately—on American politics. It's hard to imagine a time when politics wasn't dominated by TV. When did this start? It started almost immediately: In 1952, General Dwight D. Eisenhower became the first presidential candidate to air a campaign ad on TV. It was called, "A Man from Abilene." His opponent in that election, Democrat Adlai Stevenson,

coincidentally became the last presidential candidate not to run TV ads. 1952 was also the first year that the presidential nominating conventions were televised. From this point forward, American politics were shaped more and more by the TV. Increasingly, it mattered not just what a candidate said but how they looked in saying it.

The most famous example of this new factor in politics was the Nixon-Kennedy political debate of 1960; this was in the presidential election of 1960. It was the first of its kind; and that night, Kennedy, who was very handsome to begin with, did basically everything right. He wore a dark suit because he'd been told it would look good in the hot lights; he appeared very relaxed; he was also occasionally funny and showed a nice smile; but perhaps most importantly, he directed his answers to the camera and to the 70 million Americans who were watching instead of to Nixon or to the moderator. Nixon, by contrast, was not the most attractive man and things just didn't go well for him that night at all. First of all, he was exhausted from the campaign and he really looked rather haggard; he looked like he had just been dragged in. JFK actually took a nap, one of the reasons why he looked so fresh; Nixon refused to take a nap. He also refused to wear any makeup to cover up his "five o'clock shadow," which many men had by the evening. Only after an aide pleaded with him did he agree at the last minute to put on something called "Lazy Shave," which was basically like face powder; which, of course, under the bright lights of the set was not going to do anything to diminish the sort of unshaven look that he had. JFK, on the other hand, said put it on; he said if makeup's going to make me look good, I'll wear the makeup, and as a result there was such a great contrast between the two. To make matters worse, Nixon appeared nervous and he sweated a lot, which showed up on the cameras, and he didn't smile; he looked rather grim, rather serious.

Following the debate, JFK received a nice boost in the polls. Sometimes people say—we often hear one of these stories that follow from this—that people who listened on radio actually thought Nixon had won while people who watched on TV thought that Kennedy had won. This is more of a story; there's not a lot of hard evidence for that. But the general point that the story gets at is true: JFK's good looks and his poise on TV helped him in the election; there's no question about it, it helped him convince Americans

that he was the real deal. From that point forward, American politics has been dominated by television. Just to give you one example: As of 2010, expenditures on campaign advertising exceed \$3 billion; and that's just for the advertising.

TV has clearly changed the way politicians behave; think about how politicians are now really aware of the ever-present danger of scandal, so they at least allegedly watch what they do and watch what they say. Politicians also have changed the way they speak; they emphasize what we now call "sound bites" because they know that the attention span of the American people is very short and that TV is all about short segments. The rise of cable TV in recent times has spawned a vast industry of political punditry and commentary that wields an enormous influence on the opinions of voters and the actions of politicians.

What about sports? Professional sports were popular and modestly profitable enterprises in the 1950s, but the advent of TV has transformed pro sports into a multibillion dollar enterprise. Just consider the fact that the NFL's 32 teams collectively in 2010 are worth more than \$30 billion, and nearly all that value stems from television. But sports are not only more profitable because of TV, sports now occupy a central place in American culture; and professional athletes have achieved a level of celebrity rivaled only by actors and musicians.

Think also about the impact of TV on war. Up until the 1960s, the closest Americans got to war was through Hollywood films or carefully edited newsreels of events that were maybe weeks or months old and shown in movie theaters. But all that changed with Vietnam. By the time Vietnam became a massive military operation in 1966–1967, nearly every American household had a TV and nearly all of them tuned in to nightly news broadcasts. Now war coverage occurred in real time and in color; and it allowed Americans to form their own opinions of the war and the U.S. commitment to it. That's why, in our lecture on the Tet Offensive, we noted that the battle dramatically turned public opinion against President Johnson and the war even though the U.S. won the battle. Since Vietnam, of course, the American military has become quite adept at, or at least keenly interested in, limiting media access to war zones and manipulating that to some degree.

But the fact remains that the presence of TV cameras and reporters greatly influence the public's perception of warfare.

Let's look at another major area of influence: popular culture. What better example of the power of TV than Elvis Presley's legendary appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show. That took place on September 9, 1956; and contrary to the oft-repeated story that Sullivan ordered the cameras only to show Elvis from the waist up to avoid showing Elvis's gyrating hips and all that sexuality, Elvis in that first show was shown in his entirety, hips and all, and the appearance was a huge hit: 83 percent of U.S. households tuned in to watch Elvis sing some of his most famous songs like "Don't Be Cruel." Elvis actually appeared on the show two more times that year, and many historians point to Elvis's appearance as a key moment in the history of rock and roll; or at least a more raucous and high-energy version of rock and roll. Up to that point, many Americans considered rock and roll a deviant and dangerous form of music, and they were shocked by its thinly veiled references to sex and other taboo subjects. They associated rock and roll with African Americans; people like Bo Diddley, Fats Domino, Ike Turner, and Little Richard. The number one record in America in 1954, for example, was the R&B classic, "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man" by Muddy Waters. This song featured scandalous lyrics such as these: "I'm gonna make you girls / Lead me by my hand / Then the world will know / That I'm a hoochie coochie man"; pretty steamy stuff for the mid-1950s. The number three record that year was "I Got a Woman" by Ray Charles, which is also filled with sexually-charged lyrics.

Elvis's genius was his ability to take this African American R&B/rock and roll sound that he grew up with living in Mississippi and bring it into the mainstream. His appearances on the Ed Sullivan show were key to this development. Ed Sullivan initially refused to book him on the show; he declared, "I don't think Elvis Presley is fit for family viewing." But he eventually caved in, and then by the third appearance on the show, after Elvis came across as a polite, smiling young man who said "yes, sir" and "no, sir," Sullivan declared before a huge national audience, "I just want to say to you and the nation that this is one decent, fine boy... You're thoroughly all right." Suddenly, rock and roll was safe; or at least safer. Elvis Presley did

not invent rock and roll, but he brought it into the mainstream; and he did it with the help of TV.

Another impact of TV: It created intimate, shared national experiences. Before TV, major events of national significance like the attack on Pearl Harbor were experienced locally. Newspapers and radio commentators supplied the details, but they largely narrated what had already transpired. But the dawning of television, the television age, meant that such events were now suddenly brought into the homes of nearly every American simultaneously. The two best examples come from the 1960s: the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and the Apollo 11 landing on the moon. These events—one a tragedy and the other a triumph—captivated the nation. People gathered around their TV sets to “see” what was happening as it happened. Of the Kennedy assassination, one historian of TV wrote, “Americans used television to experience their grief collectively.” Some of you may have experienced this yourselves during the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

TV has also wielded a powerful influence on issues such as race and gender in American life. Initially, TV reinforced traditional notions of gender; and we noted this in the other lectures several times when referencing the image of the idealized suburban housewife. This was best exemplified by the show “Father Knows Best.” The same was true of race. The first program to feature African American actors was the incredibly racist show “The Amos ‘n Andy Show.” It ran from 1951–1953 and portrayed blacks as comical fools. But, over time, TV portrayals of women and African Americans have changed dramatically, reflecting the impact of both the women’s rights movement and the civil rights movements. A similar phenomenon has occurred in recent years regarding the portrayal of homosexuality on TV.

We could go on, but I think you get the point: From the 1950s onward, television became a major social force in American life. Over the coming decades, it became a central fixture in every home. It also became the dominant form of news and entertainment. In each succeeding decade, the hours that Americans devoted to television-watching rose significantly. By 2010, studies show that the average American watches 153 hours of TV a

month, or 1,836 hours per year. For a person who lives to age 70, that works out—get ready for this—to almost 15 years of TV watching.

Many critics decry America's obsession with TV and they do so for a number of reasons: They argue that it fosters isolation and alienation; instead of chatting it up with the neighbors out on the front stoop, we're all in our living rooms watching TV. They argue that the quality of programming is woefully low. They argue that there's too much violence on TV; that it promotes extreme consumerism; and that it has a negative health impact, it makes us more sedentary. Comedian Joey Adams once quipped, "If it weren't for the fact that the TV set and the refrigerator are so far apart, some of us wouldn't get any exercise at all." Interestingly, one of TV's harshest critics was its inventor. Remember how at one point Philo Farnsworth thought the TV would change the world for the better? In the 1950s, he refused to put a TV in his own house, and he told his children, "There's nothing on it worthwhile, and we're not going to watch it in this household, and I don't want it in your intellectual diet."

I'll leave it up to you to decide the merits of television, its pros and cons. But there's one thing we can agree upon: For good or for ill, TV's arrival in the 1950s caused deep and dramatic changes in American society, and it still does.

We'll have to leave it there in this discussion of the birth of TV. For our next lecture, we'll explore the story of the invention of the birth control pill. Until then.

1960 The Power to Choose—The Pill

Lecture 41

Throughout the course of the 20th century, American women steadily improved their levels of education and workforce participation. But one of the often-overlooked elements in this story is the invention of the birth control pill. “The pill” fundamentally changed the lives of millions of American women by giving them the ability to control when and if they wanted to become pregnant. Women could now limit the size of their families, lessening the burdens of traditional motherhood and creating opportunities for work outside the home.

Long before the pill, feminism, and the right to vote, the lives of American women had begun to change. The Industrial Revolution created factory jobs for women, but there was no rapid movement of women into wage work and public life. Among middle-class women, 19th-century reformers like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Abby Kelley Foster resisted the confining nature of the middle-class cult of domesticity. Meanwhile, for working-class women, staying home to raise children was economically impossible.

Major changes for women occurred in the 1920s. They had more access to education, job opportunities (at least until marriage), later marriage, and the freedom to move about in public without male protectors or chaperones. World War II saw additional changes as millions of American women entered the paid workforce to offset the loss of almost 16 million men who joined the armed forces. Many of these women stayed in the workforce after the war, and from this point forward the percentage of working women rose steadily. But the postwar years also saw a re-energized cultural emphasis on defining the proper aspirations of women as marriage and motherhood.

An increasing number of American women became sexually active before marriage in the 1940s and 1950s, but cultural norms made this behavior extremely risky for young women. The great majority of sexually active young women in the 1950s used no birth control at all.

In 1951, Margaret Sanger, the most famous advocate of birth control in American history, met endocrinologist Gregory Pincus and urged him to develop a pill that would prevent contraception. Pincus told her it could be done, but that he needed money to conduct the research. No major pharmaceutical company, nor the federal government, would fund such a potentially controversial product.

In early May 1960, the FDA announced the formal approval of the pill for contraceptive use. Within just two years, 1.2 million American women were using the pill.

Sanger persuaded her friend and colleague Katharine McCormick—heiress, feminist, and biologist—to fund Pincus’s work.

Pincus developed a progestin pill that he believed would trick a woman’s body into thinking she was pregnant and thus shut off the monthly release of an egg.

Obstetrician John Rock saw the potential the pill offered for improvement of women’s health and well-being and helped Pincus recruit volunteers for the first clinical trial in 1954. It was a spectacular success. Of the 50 women in the trial, not a single one ovulated.

In 1957, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the pill, under the name Enovid and produced by Searle, for the treatment of severe menstrual disorders—*not* as a contraceptive. Many doctors prescribed the pill “off label” for contraception anyway. In early May 1960, the FDA announced the formal approval of the pill for contraceptive use. Within just two years, 1.2 million American women were using the pill.

The arrival of the world’s first successful oral contraceptive touched off a heated public debate over ethics and morality. Critics argued the pill would lead to sexual promiscuity and the deterioration of the family. John Rock and others argued that the economic and medical benefits of the pill far outweighed any potential negative social effects.

Up to this point, the overwhelming majority of women using the pill were married. State laws prohibited doctors from prescribing contraceptives to single women. In 1972, the Supreme Court, in *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, struck

down such a law in Massachusetts, freeing all American women to use the pill.

It's hard to overstate the profound impact of the pill on American life since its introduction. It did not, contrary to popular lore, trigger the sexual revolution; it merely accelerated an existing trend. But it did dramatically increase educational and career opportunities for American women by allowing them more control of their own bodies, thereby lowering the costs of pursuing long-term educational and career opportunities. Women thus entering every realm of the public sphere has changed the way Americans view gender roles, family life, and sexuality. ■

Suggested Reading

Marsh and Ronner, *The Fertility Doctor*.

May, *America and the Pill*.

Questions to Consider

1. Is it possible that something as seemingly inconsequential as a daily birth control pill could trigger revolutionary changes in the lives of American women?
2. Why did the birth control pill encounter so much opposition when first introduced?

1960 The Power to Choose—The Pill

Lecture 41—Transcript

Welcome back. We meet again to dive into another key turning point in American history. Today, we look at the extraordinary story of the birth control pill and how it changed American society in several profound ways.

Let's begin with a story. On May 9, 1960, 80-year-old Margaret Sanger was having a quiet breakfast by herself in her home in Tucson, Arizona. She was now retired, but she'd spent the better part of her life as a public activist for women's rights, especially the rights of women to have access to birth control. In fact, way back in 1916 in Brooklyn, she had opened the nation's first family planning clinic, after which she was promptly arrested. Undaunted, she spent the next four decades crusading to make birth control available to all women. Sanger's breakfast that morning was interrupted by a spontaneous visit by her son and granddaughter who lived very close by. They had just read momentous news in the newspaper: The federal Food and Drug Administration had just approved the first oral contraceptive, what we know today as "The Pill." Sanger, who had played a key role in the development of The Pill, reacted with surprising calm. She sighed and said, "It's certainly about time." Then, suddenly smiling, she said, "Perhaps this calls for champagne." It was 7:00 a. m. and the world was about to change.

Before we jump into this incredibly fascinating story about The Pill, let's establish our objectives for this lecture. We'll focus on three things: First, we'll look at the slow but significant changes that had taken place in the lives of American women since the 19th century. Next, we'll examine the story of how the pill came to be invented and approved for sale. Finally, we'll explore the profound impact the Pill had on American life since 1960. Let's start by reviewing the slow but important changes that had taken place in the lives of women since the 19th century. Long before The Pill, Feminism, and the right to vote the lives of American women had begun to change. The Industrial Revolution, as you'll probably remember from our earlier lecture on Samuel Slater, began in the early 19th century by creating factory jobs for women; remember the Lowell girls. But as it turned out, this initial phase of industrialization did not lead to a rapid movement of women into wage work and into public life; in fact, quite the opposite occurred for many, many

American women. Industrialization led to the creation and rapid growth of a middle class.

Remember, we've mentioned this a few times, class is not simply a measure of how much money you earn; it's mostly about culture and values. In the 19th century, the American middle class culture that was developing was developing a notion of "separate spheres" for men and women. According to this value system, the place of men was in the world of work and politics; out there in the world. The rough and tumble world of sin, violence, corruption, and struggle. In contrast, the proper place for women was in the home; the domestic sphere. Women's magazines, preachers, and politicians in the 19th century spoke in one voice about the need for women to create and maintain a happy and nurturing home for their battle-weary husbands and their innocent children. Because women, according to this code, were naturally pious, pure, and nurturing, their primary job was to create a serene home life centered around the values of Christianity, republicanism, hard work, sobriety, and thrift. Historians, you'll remember, refer to this as the "cult of domesticity." The only acceptable public activity for middle-class women was church-related. Consider just for a moment how scandalous it was for women to even attend public meetings in the mid-19th century; and remember that one of the reasons that Elizabeth Cady Stanton vowed to launch a women's rights movement was her experience at an abolitionist convention in the early 1840s. The organizers first tried to bar women from attending and then made them sit up in the balcony, far out of sight. A few years later, one of Stanton's fellow female abolitionists, Abby Kelley Foster, had the temerity to speak before an abolitionist convention in Philadelphia. Later that evening, a crowd of angry men surrounded the building and then burned the convention hall to the ground. They were scandalized by the fact that she had spoken before what they called a "promiscuous crowd," one of those great phrases from the mid-19th century; it really just refers to a mixed crowd of men and women.

We know that some women like Stanton and Foster resisted the confining nature of this cult of domesticity; after all, more than 100 women went to that first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls in 1848. We also know that for working-class women the idea of staying home to raise children was economically impossible; they simply had to work. Through the 19th

century, rising numbers of working-class women did enter the pay-to-work force. But for most American women, they adhered to this standard, this cult of domesticity standard; and it was expected that the fundamental goal of all women was to marry and to raise children. Interestingly, there was one benefit from this new ideology, at least for women, which was that middle class families grew smaller in size; and that was part of the deal, in order to devote more time and resources to their children, so women bore fewer children. But how did they do this in the 19th century, at a time when contraceptives were largely illegal and unavailable? American women learned and then shared various techniques for avoiding pregnancy, such as extending the period of breastfeeding a newborn. They figured out that continued lactation suppressed ovulation and thus allowed women to bear fewer children, or at least to spread out the gaps between the births of their children.

Toward the end of the 19th century, however, there were some important changes in the expectations and behavior of American women. Starting in the 1870s, increasing numbers of women attended college so that by 1900, one in five of all college graduates in the United States were women, and this number continued to rise into the 20th century. Women also took a greater role in public life. For middle- and upper-class women, this usually took the form of joining social reform clubs that pushed for things like good government, temperance, and also suffrage. For working-class women, this took the form of a growing role within the labor movement. Significant numbers of women from all classes joined, as we learned in an earlier lecture about women's suffrage, the suffrage movement; the fight for the vote.

But by the early 20th century, Americans also began to speak of something they called the "New Woman." The "New Woman," it's kind of hard to define what it was—and we'd certainly not call it "feminism"—but the New Woman had several dimensions: One was a look; there was a look to the New Woman. We'd call this the "Gibson Girl" look: A woman wearing a floor-length skirt and a billowy white blouse; had her hair done up in a very fancy manner. The Gibson Girl or the New Woman look also carried with it a certain kind of attitude. These women were more free spirited, they were more independent, more willing to speak her mind; and it may seem silly, but one of the symbols of the New Woman was the bicycle. The bicycle

became all the rage in the 1890s and young women became some of the most avid riders. Susan B. Anthony thought this was a wonderful thing, and in 1896 Susan B. Anthony said, “Bicycling has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world. I stand and rejoice every time I see a woman ride by on a wheel. It gives women a feeling of freedom and self-reliance.”

During World War I, thousands of American women joined the workforce by entering factory work as part of the war effort. Of course, right after the war women were told to leave the factories and for the most part they did and went back to their traditional roles. But also in World War I, or at least the World War I era, we see the first major effort to make contraception available to American women. Margaret Sanger, the woman we met at the start of this lecture, had grown up in a large family of 11 children, and she saw her mother die at age 48, a tragedy that Margaret Sanger always blamed on the physical toll of bearing and raising 11 children. Once she reached adulthood, Sanger became a political radical and a feminist, and she soon began to focus on this issue of contraception. She said at one point, “No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body [and] can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother.”

But in the early 20th century, contraception was widely opposed by most Americans. They argued that it would undermine the family and promote immorality. Something called the Comstock Law was passed way back in 1873, and that barred the distribution of information about contraception through the mail. After that, some 22 state laws were passed that similarly curbed the distribution just the information about contraception. But in 1914, Margaret Sanger published a pamphlet on contraception with the simple title of “Family Limitation,” and this is the publication in which actually she coined the phrase “birth control.” But public authorities seized copies of the pamphlet, and she was actually forced to flee to Europe to avoid arrest. Two years later, though, she came back to the United States; and in October 16, 1916, she opened the nation’s first family planning clinic. This was located in an immigrant and working class neighborhood; a section of Brooklyn in New York called Brownsville. The clinic actually didn’t distribute any contraceptives, it was just simply giving out information; pamphlets, advice, and medical advice to women about contraception. The clinic only operated

a few days before authorities shut it down and threw Sanger, her sister, and third woman into jail, where they stayed for 30 days. Margaret Sanger would continue to fight to make information about contraception available for women, and in 1921 she founded the American Birth Control League, which ultimately became a forerunner of another organization she helped found: Planned Parenthood.

Major changes for women occurred and continued to occur into the 1920s, not simply because women now had the right to vote, but because of other things, sort of broader social things; basically, the weakening of restrictions—these older Victorian restrictions—on the behavior of young women. Young women enjoyed much more access to education, job opportunities, and delayed marriage; getting married more into their middle 20s. Significantly, they also enjoyed the freedom to move about in public without male protectors or chaperones. This change in kind of social mores in the 1920s is embodied in the “flapper” look of the era—you’ve probably seen pictures of flappers—and also in certain popular dances, especially the Charleston, which today we see as a kind of funny dance but at the time was seen as a dance of wild abandon and charged with sexuality. Another thing that was symbolically important among women in the 20s was the popularity of the cigarette. Cigarettes were relatively new in the 20s, and women became enthusiastic cigarette smokers (at the time, people didn’t quite understand the health implications that were going to become manifest in a few years).

The era of World War II brought new changes for American women: Millions of American women went back into the paid workforce, just like they did in World War I, again to offset the loss of millions of men who joined the armed forces. The symbol of this effort was “Rosie the Riveter,” but, of course, women worked in thousands of different occupations all across the country as part of this effort. Just think about these numbers: By 1944, women constituted one-third of the civilian workforce; and several hundred thousand women actually joined the military in these things called “auxiliary units,” organizations like the WAVES and the WACS. Once the war was over, government, industry, and union officials urged women to leave the workforce—“Thank you very much, job well done, now go home”—but many women actually chose to stay in the workforce after the war and from

this point forward the percentage of working women began to rise steadily, right through the 20th century.

But the postwar years of the 1940s and 50s also saw a reenergized and a reemphasized cultural pressure on women that defined their proper status and their proper goals as marriage and motherhood. This is, after all, the era of the “baby boom,” which occurred right after World War II. Between 1940 and 1960, to give you a sense of the baby boom, families with three children doubled; the numbers of families with three children doubled. Families with four children, that number quadrupled in this period. People were having more and more children; clearly the emphasis was on home life and on motherhood for so many women. We see this reflected in popular sitcoms in the era: “Father Knows Best,” “Leave It to Beaver,” “Ozzie and Harriet,” and many, many others. All of these shows featured suburban families where the husband left for work every day while the wife stayed home to care for the house and for the children.

More and more women went to college in the 1950s; in fact, 35 percent of college graduates by 1960 were women. But as late as 1970, more than half of these women would marry within one year of graduation; so they’re going to college, but they’re getting married almost immediately right after college. The rest who didn’t get married right out of college within one year did get married within just a few years. In most cases, these women might continue to work for a few more years, but once the first baby arrived, most of these working women would leave the workplace and go back into the home. We also know that an increasing number of American women became sexually active before marriage in the 1940s and 1950s; but the cultural norms of this era made this behavior extremely risky for women. We all know about the sexual double-standard: Somehow it’s “normal” for young men to engage in sexual activity before marriage, but it’s absolutely scandalous for women to do the same thing. This exposed young women who were sexually active to punishing social stigmas that branded them as “loose”; and, of course, it’s more than just about stigmas, because if this young woman became pregnant, only she and her family would suffer as a result of that. The great majority of sexually active young women—and they were, in fact, a small percentage in the 1950s—used no birth control at all; that’s what studies tell us. Contraceptives like condoms or diaphragms were very difficult to

obtain in this era. These prohibitions on premarital sex explain in part the rush to get married in this era, because for the people who adhered to the strict moral standards of the day—no premarital sex—the only way to satisfy those natural sexual urges was to get married. This was the context in the 1950s when the effort began to develop the first oral contraceptive.

Let's turn to the story of how The Pill came to be invented and approved for sale. First of all, notice how we still refer to it simply as "The Pill." That alone gives us an indication of its significance. Think about all the innumerable medical breakthroughs in history; only one merits the name, "The Pill." The story of The Pill is often told as a medical and scientific story; and necessarily, this kind of retelling focuses on the men—the doctors and the biologists—who worked to develop The Pill. But to really understand The Pill historically, we need to consider the central role also played by women in its development. First of all, let's start with the two women who got the ball rolling: In 1951, Margaret Sanger—she's the feminist we met at the start of this lecture—was already famous in America for advocating birth control, and she was still at it, even in the 1950s. She believed that despite all the advances in birth control and the changes in public attitudes and so forth, the ultimate objective of this cause was a pill; a single pill that a woman could take to prevent pregnancy.

In early 1951, she met a scientist named Gregory Pincus at a dinner party in New York, and she urged him to begin research into what she called "a magic pill" that would prevent contraception. Pincus told her that it could be done using hormones, but that he needed money to conduct the research. At the time, no major pharmaceutical company dared risk the public criticism—or worse, a consumer boycott—by associating itself with a potentially controversial product like a birth control pill. Pincus also knew that officials in the federal government had made it very clear that no funding would be made available for this kind of research. Remember, opponents of birth control had always argued that it promoted illicit sexual activity; so there was serious social prohibition against this kind of research.

At this point entered Katherine McCormick; sometimes known as "the Mother of The Pill." Katherine McCormick was a wealthy feminist who'd been active in the suffrage movement and other women's rights causes

from years on. She was also a biologist; she was only the second woman ever to graduate from MIT. Her fortune came from her grandfather, Cyrus McCormick; he's the man who invented the mechanical reaper and then founded a company that eventually became International Harvester. So she had lots of money, and she's a feminist. McCormick and Sanger were old friends. They had worked together on women's rights causes since the 19-teens. In 1953, Sanger spoke to McCormick and convinced her to provide money directly to Pincus, who seemed to her both competent and personally committed to the cause of developing a birth control pill as a means of reducing poverty and empowering women to choose the number of children that they wanted to bear. Katherine McCormick gave Pincus an initial check for \$40,000—which was a huge sum of money at the time—and over the next few decades she would continue to fund this to the tune of nearly \$3 million; little wonder why she's called “the Mother of The Pill.”

Pincus studied the role of the hormone progesterin in pregnancy. He knew that a woman's body released lots of progesterin as soon as she became pregnant and that this hormone told a woman's body to stop ovulating; that is, to stop releasing a unfertilized egg about every month. Would it be possible, Pincus wondered, to create a progesterin pill that would “trick” a woman's body into thinking she that was pregnant and thus shut off the normal monthly release of an egg? The chances of this technique becoming a reality were boosted just at the time he was thinking about this by news that researchers elsewhere who had recently discovered how to make a synthetic progesterin. By 1954, Gregory Pincus had developed a prototype of The Pill, but now he needed patients, basically to conduct trials. In essence, he had the money and he had the science, but he needed patients in order to test this secret work. He turned to a physician named Doctor John Rock.

In the early 1950s, Doctor John Rock was probably the nation's foremost obstetrician, certainly one of them, and he was a legend at Harvard Medical School. Initially, his research had been focused on the problem of infertility in women. With time, Rock focused his research on the role hormones such as progesterin and estrogen and how they played a role in the ovulation process; and, of course, he was looking for possible ways to manipulate these hormones in a woman's body to increase her chances of getting pregnant. But because these two processes—contraception and conception—were

related, John Rock was receptive to the idea of joining forces with Gregory Pincus. Early in Rock's career, he had worked in a women's hospital where he saw firsthand the trials and tribulations of poor women with difficult or unwanted pregnancies. He saw the development of oral contraceptives as a major advance in the improvement of women's health and wellbeing. That's how it started: In 1954, Pincus and Rock began their first trial of The Pill, which was a combination of several synthetic hormones.

Here's another point where we need to emphasize the role of women in this process. Thousands of women volunteered for the clinical trials of The Pill. Without their participation, there simply would have been no Pill. Women would also play a critical role later in demanding The Pill be made safer. They would also be at the forefront of the legal struggle to overturn state laws that barred the sale and use of contraceptives.

But back to the first clinical trial in 1954; how did it go? It was a spectacular success. Of the 50 women in the trial, not a single one ovulated. Then, over the next few years, with more money provided by McCormick, Pincus, Rock, and other scientists conducted more and larger trials with similarly favorable results. In 1956, they signed a contract with the giant pharmaceutical company named Searle to produce The Pill. One year later, they applied to the FDA, the Food and Drug Administration, for approval of The Pill; and now they gave it an official name, "Enovid." They applied for this pill to be approved, but they didn't apply for it to be used as a contraceptive, they said it's good for helping women with severe menstrual disorders; these were the grounds in which they were going to get it approved for public use. But as so often happens, many doctors, as soon as it was approved, began prescribing The Pill "off label," as it's called; that's for unapproved purposes, and, of course, that was for contraception. Very quickly—within just a short period of time—by 1959, more than 500,000 American women were taking The Pill, allegedly for "menstrual disorders" (but obviously mostly for the value of its use as a contraceptive). This turned out to be big business: Searle's sales by 1959 were \$37 million. Later that year, Searle applied to the FDA to approve The Pill as a contraceptive. The Pill raced through the FDA approval process with remarkable speed, and in early May, 1960, the FDA announced the formal approval of The Pill. Within just two years, 1.2 million women had begun to use The Pill.

The arrival of the world's first successful oral contraceptive touched off a heated public debate over the ethics and the morality of it. Critics argued that it would lead to sexual promiscuity and ultimately the deterioration of the family. John Rock, one of the key players, took the lead in arguing before the public about the benefits of The Pill, and he said the benefits far outweighed any negative social consequences that might come along with it. John Rock was a devout Roman Catholic, so he was especially keen on convincing Catholics that The Pill did not violate Church teachings on contraception. In 1963, he published a book entitled *The Time Has Come: A Catholic Doctor's Proposal to End the Battle over Birth Control*. This book led to all kinds of high-profile feature stories in major publications like *Time Magazine* and lots of television interviews; but five years later, to Rock's dismay, the Catholic Church declared all artificial forms of birth control in violation of Church teachings (that's 1968). But by then, The Pill had become a sensation. By 1968, millions of American women, including many Catholic women, were enjoying its benefits. Indeed, one study in 1970 revealed that in spite of Church doctrine, more than two-thirds of all Catholic women had begun to use contraceptives, and most of them were using The Pill. By 1980, the figure had risen to 80 percent.

In 1967, *Time Magazine* put The Pill on its cover. It was by far the most popular form of birth control in the nation, with almost 10 million women using it; 12.5 million worldwide. In 1968, the same year that the Vatican banned The Pill (at least for Catholics), Hollywood released the film, "Prudence and the Pill," starring David Niven and Deborah Kerr. This marked The Pill's official entrance into pop culture. The Pill encountered controversy in the late 1960s and early 1970s when a number of women and medical professionals questioned its safety, and the Senate began hearings in 1970 to look into this. They ended up passing a law mandating that all packages of The Pill carry an insert listing potential health problems and side effects. Initially, this caused The Pill's sales to decline about 20 percent in the aftermath of the hearings; but they soon rebounded once confidence was boosted that The Pill was indeed safe.

Up to this point, the overwhelming majority of women using The Pill were married. Single women faced state laws that prohibited doctors from prescribing contraceptives to single women. That changed in 1972, when the

Supreme Court ruled in a famous decision *Eisenstadt v. Baird* that any state could not prohibit the distribution of birth control to a single woman; and this was to strike down a law in Massachusetts that had said this very thing, that you couldn't distribute it to single women. From that point forward, The Pill steadily grew in popularity; and it continues to this day to be the most widely used method of birth control in America.

Why is this a big deal? Was this really a turning point in American history? Without a doubt, the answer is yes. It's hard to overstate the profound impact of The Pill on American life since its introduction in 1960. To start, let's note just a few important aspects of The Pill: Number one, when used properly it has an effectiveness rate of over 99 percent, and no other contraceptive comes close. Number two, it's a contraceptive completely controlled by women. But let's also note something about The Pill, in this case something that it did not do. It did not, contrary to popular lore, trigger the sexual revolution. Sexual mores were already changing in the 1950s and in the 1960s long before The Pill became available to single women only in the early 1970s. The Pill simply accelerated that trend that had already started in American life. So what is it that makes The Pill so important? In a word, The Pill dramatically increased educational and career opportunities for American women; and it did so, economists tell us, by sharply lowering the potential costs of pursuing long-term educational and career opportunities. In other words, if a woman became pregnant accidentally, she might have to abandon her education or her job, effectively having to throw out the window the time, the money, and the effort that she'd invested to that point in her career or her education. Controlling her fertility, on the other hand, through The Pill allowed American women to stay in school or on a career path for as long as they wanted. It dramatically reduced the likelihood that an unplanned pregnancy would force her to drop out of school or leave her job.

As The Pill became more and more available to single women beginning in the early 1970s, these trends simply accelerated. The story is one most easily told by looking at numbers. In 1970, 10 percent of first-year law students were women; ten years later, in 1980, 36 percent. By 2000, more than half the law students in America were women. Similarly impressive increases are found in almost every category of graduate education, from MBAs to

PhDs in history. The numbers are equally astonishing in the workplace: In 2010, women constitute half the American workforce; and a majority of these women, two-thirds of these women, are married. We can see it in politics: In 2010, 89 women served in the House of Representatives and 17 in the Senate. That's still far below 50 percent, but it's still a very impressive increase since the 1960s. You can see even more impressive numbers if you look at women's political participation at the state and local level.

These numbers really only tell part of the story. The impact of women entering every realm of the public sphere has changed the way Americans view gender roles, family life, and sexuality. Now these changes were not all attributable to The Pill; but it was The Pill, in combination with a vigorous women's rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s, which propelled these changes forward. As the prominent historian of women in America Elaine Tyler May put it, it was American women who forced open the doors of opportunity in the school, the workplace, the athletic field, and elective office; but The Pill made it possible for women to walk through those doors.

We'll have to leave it there in this discussion of the birth control pill and its impact on the lives of American women. In our next lecture, we head south to Birmingham, Alabama to examine the events that unfolded there in that city in the spring of 1963 and set the civil rights movement on the road to success. Thank you.

1963 Showdown in Birmingham—Civil Rights

Lecture 42

The 1950s saw the advent of a full-blown civil rights movement for African Americans, led by visionary figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and founded on nonviolent principles. Yet Southern opposition, bolstered by figures in Congress, remained firm. Extensive news coverage of peaceful civil rights marchers being attacked by police, dogs, and fire hoses, in Birmingham, Alabama, in the spring and summer of 1963 prompted President John F. Kennedy to call for a new Civil Rights Act.

Historians debate the exact beginning of the civil rights movement in American history. James Horton has argued that it began in 1619 with the arrival of the first slaves at Jamestown—that African Americans, in ways large and small, have always been fighting for freedom.

Reconstruction was initially marked by a series of astonishing accomplishments toward equal rights for African Americans, but by the late 1870s, a white supremacist counterrevolution succeeded in suppressing implementing a system of segregation, discrimination, and violence known as Jim Crow. That system was still in place in the early 1950s.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, civil rights activists made many strides toward equality. In 1954, the Supreme Court issued the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that desegregated public schools. In 1955, the Montgomery bus boycott led to the desegregation of the city's busses. In 1957, Congress empowered the federal government to seek court injunctions against cities and states that obstructed voting rights. In 1960, sit-ins by African American students prompted desegregation of lunch counters and other businesses in Greensboro, North Carolina.

In late 1962, civil rights leaders decided to take on a city known far and wide as resolutely committed to white supremacy and willing to use violence to maintain it: Birmingham, Alabama. They called their plan Project C—the C standing for confrontation through peaceful sit-ins and marches. Their goal

was to defeat segregation in the most segregated city in the South, thereby weakening the system everywhere, as well as to garner media attention and Congressional support for their cause.

The sit-ins and marches began in early April 1963. Several hundred protesters were arrested, but the incidents drew almost no media coverage. On Good Friday, April 12, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. was among

Scenes of violence against the nonviolent protesters were broadcast via television to millions of Americans, boosting sympathy and support for the basic aims of the civil rights movement.

those arrested; it was during this time he penned his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” But the Birmingham effort began to sputter, so the leaders drafted thousands of school children to join the marches and demonstrations.

On May 3, Birmingham’s head of public safety, Eugene “Bull” Connor, made a fateful decision; he ordered the Birmingham fire department to break up the protests

by turning high pressure fire hoses on the demonstrators and ordered the police to bring in dogs to terrify and bite the protesters, including the school children. The ensuing scenes of violence against the nonviolent protesters were broadcast via television to millions of Americans, boosting sympathy and support for the basic aims of the civil rights movement.

Birmingham’s city officials eventually gave in to public opinion and began a program of desegregation, but Project C’s most important effect took place in Washington DC. The images from the protests moved President Kennedy to deliver a national address on June 11, 1963, calling for new federal civil rights legislation. The legislation called for the restoration of black voting rights, an end to segregation in all places of public accommodation, prohibition of job discrimination, and expanded powers for the attorney general to enforce these measures.

Civil rights leaders, to keep up the pressure on Congress, planned for a march on Washington DC that summer. On August 28, over 200,000 people

joined the march and witnessed Reverend King’s famed “I have a dream” address, one of the greatest speeches in American history.

The legislation’s success was, sadly, ensured by one more tragedy: Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963. His successor, President Lyndon Johnson, declared passage of the languishing civil rights bill a “fitting tribute” to the slain president.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 effectively restored the Fourteenth Amendment that had been thwarted by Jim Crow. The following year, a second Civil Rights Act which protected voting rights effectively restored the Fifteenth Amendment. Neither of these two landmark acts ended racism in the United States, but they surely put the nation on a new, better path toward equality. ■

Suggested Reading

McWhorter, *Carry Me Home*.

Williams, *Eyes on the Prize*.

Questions to Consider

1. Can it be said that Eugene “Bull” Connor was a major asset to the civil rights movement?
2. How should we judge President John F. Kennedy’s record on civil rights?

1963 Showdown in Birmingham—Civil Rights

Lecture 42—Transcript

Good to see you again. It's time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Today, we look at the events in the spring of 1963 that changed the course of the Civil Rights Movement.

Let me start by recounting a story of an experience I had not long ago. A few years ago, I had the privilege to have lunch and a few beers with a famous African American historian named James Horton. I was part of a group of historians and teachers, and soon the discussion over this lunch turned to how we teach the Civil Rights Movement. At one point, Professor Horton asked us: How do we define the start of the Civil Rights Movement? In other words, what year do we tell our students that it began? This simple question touched off a lively debate in which we all put forth possible starting points. 1945, the year hundreds of thousands of African American soldiers and sailors returned from World War II, many of them committed to pushing for racial justice? What about 1947, the year Jackie Robinson broke the color line in baseball. Or 1948, the year President Harry Truman ordered the U.S. military to desegregate? Or 1954, the year the Supreme Court rendered its *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision? Eventually, Professor Horton smiled and said, "You're all wrong." After we had finished laughing he said, "I'll tell you when the Civil Rights Movement began. It began in 1619 when the first African Americans landed at Jamestown as slaves."

His thought-provoking point, of course, was that African Americans had resisted racial oppression from the moment that they were enslaved and they continued to do so under Jim Crow, all the way up into the 20th century. This resistance may not have been as noticeable as the major events of the 1950s and 1960s, but it was there, and it paved the way for the eventual rise of the formal Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s. So while our lecture today focuses on the 1950s and 1960s, we would do well to keep Professor Horton's words in mind.

Before we plunge into the story of the Civil Rights Movement, let's set out our objectives for this lecture. We'll focus on four main points: First, we'll look at the status of African Americans in the early 1950s. Next, we'll

examine the notable incidents in the early Civil Rights Movement up to 1963. Then we'll explore the critical year of 1963, in particular the protests and violence in Birmingham, Alabama. Then, finally, we'll detail the process that led to the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965.

Let's begin by looking at the status of African Americans in the early 1950s. You'll no doubt remember that in our early lectures on the 14th Amendment and the Colfax Massacre we noted the period following the Civil War known as "Reconstruction" was initially marked by a series of astonishing accomplishments: African Americans gained full citizenship, equality before the law, voting rights, and guarantees of federal protection against any state or local government that sought to deprive them of their basic civil rights. But by the late 1870s, a white supremacist counterrevolution succeeded in suppressing these hard-won rights and freedoms, basically thereby imposing a system of segregation, of discrimination, and violence, a system that we collectively call "Jim Crow." That system of Jim Crow was still in place in the early 1950s. Throughout the South, African Americans lived in segregated neighborhoods, they attended segregated and inferior schools, they visited segregated and inferior hospitals, and everywhere they faced demeaning signs marking "white" and "colored" waiting rooms, restrooms, and water fountains. Most African Americans were deprived of the right to vote. In Mississippi in the early 1950s, for example, only 5 percent of voting-age African Americans were registered to vote. Job discrimination and restricted educational opportunities left most African Americans relegated to poorly paid work. In Mississippi in the early 1950s, 86 percent of African American families lived below the national poverty line; and hovering over this system, the thing that kept it all cemented in place, was the ever-present threat of violence. Don't think Jim Crow only existed in the American South. True, it was probably worse in the American South; but African Americans faced segregation, job discrimination, and second-class citizenship throughout much of the North. Civil Rights activists like Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and organizations like the NAACP had been staging civil rights campaigns for jobs and better housing and filing lawsuits against school segregation in the North since the 1940s.

Remember that I've said more than a few times over the course of these lectures that history is the study of surprises. In other words, we see over and

over again that people in the past almost never see the big change that's right around the corner and soon to rock their world. The same is true of us right now, of course; we don't know what's coming next. In 1950, if you polled Americans in both the North and the South and asked them if they foresaw a revolution in race relations coming in the next few years, nearly everyone would have said, "No." In other words, a civil rights revolution was probably the last thing that most Americans expected; and yet ...

Now let's examine the notable incidents of the early Civil Rights Movement up to 1963; and I should point out here an important point I made first back way in the lecture on the Colfax Massacre and the end of Reconstruction. You may recall in that lecture that I noted that despite the end of Reconstruction and despite the fact that African Americans lost voting rights, economic power, and equality before the law, African Americans had two things that could not be taken away: the 14th and 15th Amendments. These amendments remained in place, ready to be reinvigorated and reactivated, if you will, by the Civil Rights Movement. As a result, civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King and others would have a great advantage heading into this struggle in the 1950s and the 1960s. They're not asking for new rights; they make the point over and over again. They already have these rights; they're in the Constitution. That allows them to make a very powerful claim: to demand the government not give them new rights but the government live up to its obligation to enforce and protect those rights that already exist.

Ok, back to the action. By 1963, civil rights activists could look back over the past decade and see many accomplishments. In 1954, in response to a lawsuit lodged by the NAACP, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that segregation in public facilities like schools was unconstitutional. A year later, in 1955, after the arrest of Rosa Parks, the black citizens of Montgomery, Alabama staged a boycott that led to the desegregation of the city's busses. That event also led to the emergence of a 27-year-old Baptist minister named Martin Luther King. In 1957, Congress passed the first Civil Rights Act since Reconstruction. It empowered the federal government to seek court injunctions against cities and states that obstructed voting rights and other things. In reality, the law was actually quite weak; but it carried important symbolic weight. That same year, in 1957, after a court order required Little Rock, Arkansas to desegregate its

public schools, the governor of that state, Orville Faubus, issued an order to the National Guard to come in and prevent integration from taking place. But in a demonstration of how times were really changing by the late 1950s, President Dwight D Eisenhower sent in the United States military to ensure that nine African American students, the famous “Little Rock Nine,” were allowed to enter Little Rock’s Central High School. You’ve probably all seen many of those famous photos of that incident. In 1960, African American students in Greensboro, North Carolina began a series of highly-publicized sit-ins that garnered national news coverage and eventually prompted desegregation of lunch counters and other businesses.

By 1960, the Civil Rights Movement had succeeded in winning several major legal victories. It had also succeeded in prompting many white Americans to confront the reality of racial inequality in their society. But there was also a lot of frustration within the movement. The reality was that little had changed in the lives of most African Americans. Resistance to civil rights in the South seemed stronger than ever. For example, in 1961, civil rights activists organized the Freedom Rides. The goal of this was for civil rights activists to ride board buses and ride them from Washington, D.C. all the way to New Orleans; and this was designed to draw attention to the segregated bus stations all along the interstate highway system. They were met with furious violence. Outside Anniston, Alabama a firebomb was thrown into the bus and then as Freedom Riders poured off of the bus to get away from the fire, they were savagely beaten by local thugs. In Birmingham, Alabama, Klansmen attacked the riders with bats and chains while the local police looked on and refused to intervene. Later that year, Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders launched a huge campaign in Albany, Georgia demanding the right to vote and an end to segregation. This one lasted eight months and resulted in lots of arrests, but in the end it achieved no results; and Martin Luther King even admitted that the effort in Albany was a “partial victory” at best. He said, “Our protest was so vague that we got nothing and the people were left very depressed and in despair.” (The people he’s referring to are civil rights workers.)

Many civil rights leaders in late 1962 were wondering: What’s next? They eventually decided to launch another campaign of nonviolent protest to demand the right to vote and an end to segregation. Only this time, instead

of targeting a small town like Albany, Georgia, they would take on a city known far and wide as one resolutely committed to white supremacy and one willing to use violence to maintain it. This was Birmingham, Alabama.

Now let's explore the critical year of 1963, in particular the protests that took place in Birmingham. At the time, Birmingham was widely seen as the one of the most segregated cities in the United States. All of its public facilities—from schools and hospitals, restrooms and department store fitting rooms, to parks and bus stations—were rigidly segregated, and this fact reflected the attitude of the state's governor, George Wallace, who at his inauguration famously vowed to uphold “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!” Birmingham was also widely known as a city that allowed vigilante groups like the Ku Klux Klan to operate freely, waging an incessant campaign of racial intimidation that included 50 cross burnings and 17 bombings of black homes, churches, and businesses just between 1957 and 1963 alone. In fact, by this time, Birmingham's nickname had become “Bombingham” because of all this violence. Martin Luther King described Birmingham at this time as “a police state.”

King and other civil rights leaders had developed a plan as they approached Birmingham, a plan they called “Project C”—the “C” stood for “confrontation”—and it had three primary strategic goals: One was to defeat segregation in the city; in a city that was most deeply committed to segregation, Birmingham. In so doing, this would hopefully weaken segregation across the South. The second goal was to stimulate enough national awareness through media coverage to force a cautious John F. Kennedy administration to fulfill its obligation to defend the civil rights of African Americans. The third point was they wanted to generate sufficient popular support in the North to prod Congress to overcome Southern opposition and pass a national civil rights act that would outlaw segregation and outlaw racial discrimination everywhere.

To achieve this end, they developed a two-point strategy: First, they would, in true nonviolent fashion, fill the city's jails with people arrested at lunch counter sit-ins and at mass marches. Second, they would create a boycott of the city's white merchants in the spring; this is basically trying to hit the merchants during very important shopping season, the Easter shopping

season. The sit-ins and the marches began in early April, and very quickly several hundred protesters were arrested and cast in jail. But the incidents drew almost no media coverage. On Good Friday, April 12, Martin Luther King, Jr. faced his biggest decision to date. They'd planned another big protest march for that day. But King faced a dilemma. Should he cancel the march? The reason he was thinking about this was there were 300 people in jail and the city had announced it would no longer accept bail bonds to free the people languishing in jail. Now the protestors, if they wanted to get out, needed to provide cash; and the Civil Rights Movement didn't have enough cash to get these people out. The city had obtained a court injunction prohibiting this planned march, so if they did march they were defying the law. This was sure to bring big trouble, probably hundreds more arrests, and very likely, since it was Birmingham, some violence.

If King decided to go through with the march, there was a second question: Should he march? Many of his advisors told him, "Don't march." The movement, they said, could not afford to have him locked in jail; it might kill the movement. King was trying to decide what to do here, and it's a moment of truth, if you will. He's in the Gaston Motel in Birmingham with his advisors. Let's listen to what he said when he later wrote about this difficult decision that he was mulling over:

I thought I was standing at the center of all that my life had brought me to be. I thought of the twenty-four people, waiting in the next room. I thought of the three hundred, waiting in prison. ... Then my tortured mind leaped beyond the Gaston Motel ... and I thought of the twenty million black people who dreamed that someday they might be able to cross the Red Sea of injustice and find their way into the promised land of integration and freedom.

With that, King decided to defy the injunction—the first time he had ever done so—and to stage the march that day. As expected, the city's police arrested and jailed King and 50 others. King soon penned his famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," in which he defended the peaceful but confrontational approach of the civil rights activists in Birmingham and their demand for immediate change. He also chided white political leaders like

President John F. Kennedy for always telling civil rights leaders that they needed to go slow and exhibit patience. Let's listen to what he had to say:

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. ... For years now, I have heard the word "Wait!" ... This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

By late April, even after King was released from jail, the Birmingham effort had begun to sputter. The Southern Christian Leadership Coalition, which was one of the key organizations involved, had run out of money and was unable to bail out any more of the arrested protesters. Many of these people were fearful of losing their jobs because they would end up spending six months in jail; so fewer and fewer African Americans began to turn out to continue the protest. Then, just when it seemed the effort was lost, King and the other civil rights leaders turned to a bold tactic: They organized thousands of schoolchildren to join the marches. It started on May 2, and by day's end nearly 1,000 students were in jail. Their spirit was captured in a letter by one boy to his father; let's listen to what he had to say. He wrote:

Daddy, I don't want to disobey you, but I have made my pledge. If you try to keep me home, I will sneak off. If you think I deserve to be punished for that, I'll just have to take the punishment. For you see, I'm not doing this only because I want to be free. I'm doing it also because I want freedom for you and Mama, and I want it to come before you die.

Here you see one of our themes at work that we've talked about in many of our lectures: the theme of agency. This is a great example of everyday people—nameless, faceless people—moving history; taking action to achieve an end.

On May 3 as thousands more students participated in these protests, the city's head of public safety, a man named "Bull" Connor, made a fateful decision. Bull Connor was a man right out of central casting: He was a portly, red-

faced white supremacist willing to resort to almost any measure to uphold segregation. This image and his attempts to crush the protests would prove enormously valuable to the Civil Rights Movement; in fact, you might say he was one of the best things ever to happen to the Civil Rights Movement. On May 3, Connor ordered the Birmingham Fire Department to help break up the protests by turning high pressure fire hoses on the demonstrators. He also ordered the police to bring in dogs to terrify and if necessary to bite the protesters. Before long, several thousand protesters were in jail. As civil rights leader John Lewis later remembered, “We didn’t fully comprehend at first what was happening. We were witnessing police violence and brutality Birmingham-style: unfortunately for Bull Connor, so was the rest of the world.” The ensuing scenes of violence meted out against the nonviolent protesters were broadcast via television into the homes of millions of Americans, and this boosted sympathy and support for the basic aims of the civil rights movement: to end segregation and to regain the right to vote. City officials in Birmingham eventually caved in to the mounting public pressure and they agreed to a truce. Then they subsequently agreed to a list of reforms that included the repeal of Birmingham’s segregation laws and to the desegregation of lunch counters. But the greater impact of what happened in Birmingham was felt in Washington, D.C.

In early June, President John F. Kennedy picked up his edition of the *New York Times* and fixated on a front page photo, and it was a photo that showed a police dog biting a young black protester in the stomach. Kennedy was sympathetic to the Civil Rights Movement but he wanted to move slowly on this issue, basically because of the tricky political situation that he faced. He’d barely won the presidential election in 1960 over Nixon and so he needed the votes of Southern Democrats if he wanted to win a second term; and pushing for civil rights was not part of this strategy. Nonetheless, Kennedy told his advisors that he was sickened by this photo; and he decided, despite the enormous political risks, to address the nation on national television to announce that he would soon ask Congress to pass a new Civil Rights Act to begin ending Jim Crow. Let’s listen to this address:

We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution. The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal

rights and equal opportunities. ... One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free. They are not yet freed from the bonds of injustice. They are not yet freed from social and economic oppression. And this Nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free. ... Now the time has come for this Nation to fulfill its promise.

Even detractors of President Kennedy must admit that this historic address required a significant measure of political courage from a president who was facing a hostile Congress that was controlled by Republicans and pro-segregation Democrats and a president facing this tough reelection fight in the coming year. The civil rights bill, which he formally requested nine days later, called for the restoration of black voting rights, an end to segregation in all public places of accommodation, prohibition of job discrimination, and expanded powers—this is really the important part—for the Attorney General to enforce these measures; to bring federal power to bear on this question.

As if to emphasize the need for such a law, the day following Kennedy's televised address, Mississippi civil rights leader Medgar Evers was assassinated by white supremacists, gunned down in front of his family. Still, obstructionists in Congress were committed to thwarting the bill at all costs and Kennedy knew that much of the summer and fall of 1963 would be taken up with the political struggle over this issue. But Kennedy thought he might gain an important advantage from proposing the new civil rights bill. He hoped it would convince King and other civil rights leaders to pull back from their campaign of nonviolent confrontation and this would ideally calm the political waters and provide less fodder for segregationists in Congress to condemn the movement as radical and dangerous. He thought proposing a civil rights act would get King to back down a little bit; that would calm the political waters and increase the chances of passing this law.

To John F. Kennedy's dismay, he soon learned that King and much of the civil rights establishment took precisely the opposite view. They announced plans for a mass protest, a March on Washington, for sometime later that summer in 1963 to put pressure on Congress to move on this civil rights bill.

Kennedy was convinced that such a confrontation would have disastrous political results both for his administration and for the Civil Rights Movement; so he initially tried to stop the event from even happening at all. When that proved impossible, the Kennedy administration worked to make sure that the event came across as peaceful, as interracial, and also as moderate. On August 28, over 200,000 people marched in what turned out to be a triumphant showcase of the Civil Rights Movement's commitment to ending racial oppression in America. Capping that day, of course, was Martin Luther King's famed address; one of the great addresses in American history. Let's listen to those famous words; we've probably all heard them many, many times over. King said:

I have a dream that ... the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood ... when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

As inspirational as King's speech was, it did not change the political reality in Washington. Southern opposition in Congress succeeded in the coming months to prevent a civil rights bill from even coming up for a vote. But then in November, 1963, John F. Kennedy was assassinated. It's worth pointing out that the reason he was in Dallas was because he felt he needed to shore up his support in the South; and that's why he's there when, unfortunately, an assassin killed him. Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Baines Johnson, decided to make passage of the civil rights bill, which was just languishing at this point, a "fitting tribute" to the slain president; he said that many, many times over. Drawing upon his tremendous skills as a legislator and invoking Kennedy's memory, Lyndon Johnson succeeded in getting the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This law banned segregation and job discrimination, and in so doing it effectively restored the 14th Amendment that had been ignored since the days of Reconstruction. Let's listen to what Lyndon Johnson said when he signed this historic act into law:

We believe that all men are entitled to the blessings of liberty. Yet millions are being deprived of those blessings—not because of their

own failures, but because of the color of their skin. ... It cannot continue. Our Constitution, the foundation of our Republic, forbids it. The principles of our freedom forbid it. Morality forbids it. And the law I will sign tonight forbids it.

The following year, President Johnson signed a second rights act, the Voting Rights Act, which enacted measures to protect voting rights throughout the country, particularly in the South. This law, of course, effectively restored the 15th Amendment which, like the 14th Amendment, had been ignored since the end of Reconstruction.

No realistic person will argue that these two landmark bills ended the scourge of racism in the United States. But they surely marked one of the most significant turning points in American history by putting the nation on a new path towards fulfilling the promise that was at the heart of the Spirit of '76: "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." The key moment, the turning point in this overall struggle to secure these laws, came about in part as a result of the extraordinary events on the streets of Birmingham, Alabama in the summer of 1963.

That's all for the Civil Rights Movement today. In our next lecture, we'll head for Vietnam to explore how the Tet Offensive in early 1968 dramatically changed the course of the war for America. Until then.

1968 Losing Vietnam—The Tet Offensive

Lecture 43

Public support for the Vietnam War remained high well into 1967—fully two years after the first U.S. troops entered the war, but the Tet Offensive of January–February 1968 caused a dramatic shift in public opinion. The American public was shocked by the seeming strength of an enemy the Pentagon had assured them was near defeat. Ultimately, the war was a humiliating loss for the world’s leading superpower, and its military, diplomatic, and political impact would be felt for at least another generation.

Vietnam declared its independence from Japanese and French occupation in 1945, in the wake of World War II. The nationalist leader, Ho Chi Minh, modeled the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence on the American one. The French refused to grant independence, leading to the First Indochinese War (1946–1954).

Despite support from the United States in the form of money and equipment, the French lost the war, and the United Nations stepped in to help transition Vietnam to self-government. The UN partitioned the territory and scheduled elections for 1956, but the elections were canceled due to pressure from the United States, who feared Ho Chi Minh, a communist, would win.

In 1960, the North Vietnamese launched an offensive to reunite the country—the Second Indochinese War—using guerilla tactics. Soon the South Vietnamese government was reeling. The United States, as part of their official foreign policy to contain the spread of communism worldwide, sent in military advisors to assist them.

Officially, the U.S. policy of containment was a humanitarian mission, a commitment to international freedom and democracy. That said, some historians and social critics take the more cynical view that this idealism was merely a cover for American imperialism.

After years of financial and diplomatic assistance only, the United States suddenly committed to a massive military escalation in Vietnam, beginning in 1965. President Lyndon Johnson believed he had no choice; he thought he would be vilified by conservatives and cold war hawks if he “lost” Vietnam. He also believed he could pull it off, that the most powerful military in the world would have no difficulty in defeating a rag-tag collection of poorly armed North Vietnamese peasants.

The infusion of American troops proceeded at a rapid pace, escalating from 23,300 advisors to over 500,000 combat troops in less than four years. And then, just as suddenly, the U.S. began pulling troops out of Vietnam. The U.S. strategy was failing in all of its objectives: to secure South Vietnam’s territory, stabilize the South Vietnamese government, and maintain Americans’ support for the war.

The antiwar movement in the United States was in motion by 1966, but the overall American public was still solidly behind the war. Most Americans believed they had a duty to protect the world from communism, and the government reassured them that victory was close at hand. Yet the U.S. death toll was soaring.

Then, on January 31, 1968, the North Vietnamese launched the Tet Offensive, a massive surprise attack on 100 South Vietnamese towns and cities. For many Americans, the grim images on their televisions finally cast doubt on the Pentagon’s reassurances.

Although the U.S. and South Vietnamese side thwarted the Tet Offensive, the crisis of American public opinion became the decisive tipping point in the war. It created the impression that the Vietnam War was unwinnable, or at least too costly in terms of human life. The antiwar movement ramped up. Johnson’s approval rating dropped to 35 percent, and he abandoned his reelection campaign.

For many Americans, the grim images on their televisions finally cast doubt on the Pentagon’s reassurances.

In November 1968, Richard Nixon was elected president on a platform of de-escalation and withdrawal from the war. In January 1973, a peace accord was reached; in 1975, South Vietnam fell to North Vietnam.

Many Americans would argue that the lesson of Vietnam is not to get involved in another nation's civil war; others would say it was to never fight a war half-heartedly. One lesson we can all agree on is that a democracy cannot win a long, protracted war without the support of its citizens. ■

Suggested Reading

Herring, *America's Longest War*.

Oberdorfer, *Tet!*

Questions to Consider

1. How does the impact of the Tet Offensive highlight the fact that success in war, especially for a democracy, involves a good deal more than military might and battlefield success?
2. Given President Lyndon Johnson's extraordinary accomplishments on the domestic front, notably in the realms of civil rights and antipoverty programs, do you agree with those who argue that he would be considered one the greatest U.S. presidents if not for Vietnam?

1968 Losing Vietnam—The Tet Offensive

Lecture 43—Transcript

Welcome back. Today our examination of key turning points in American history takes us back to 1968 and the Vietnam War.

Let's start out with a short quiz. Don't worry, only you'll know how well you do and I won't be collecting any quizzes at the end. Here we go with the first question: How many people were killed in the Vietnam War? That's question number one. Question number two: True or False, minorities served in disproportionately high numbers in the U.S. armed forces during Vietnam. Number three: What percentage of soldiers who served in Vietnam were drafted? I'll give you three choices here: 25 percent, 50 percent, or 75 percent? Question number four: What percentage of the American public opposed the Vietnam War at the beginning of 1968? Was it 30 percent, 40 percent, 50 percent, 60 percent, 70 percent, or 80 percent? While you're thinking about these answers, let me tell you something about it. I give this quiz a lot to students and to general audiences, and people are always surprised how many of the answers they get wrong.

So what are the answers? How many people were killed in the Vietnam War? That's our first question. This is a bit of a trick question, basically the way that I worded it. I asked for the total number killed not just American military personnel. The total number people killed in the Vietnam War was over 2 million, and that included over 58,000 Americans. Second question: True or false, minorities served in disproportionately high numbers in the U.S. armed forces in Vietnam. That answer is false. Number three: What percentage of soldiers who served in Vietnam were drafted? 25 percent, 50 percent, or 75 percent? This one is always a surprise to many people: 25 percent. We have an image in our mind of most people being drafted. Question number four: What percentage of the American public opposed the Vietnam War at the beginning of 1968? Was it 30 percent or somewhere on up to 80 percent? The answer is 50 percent, which is another way of saying 50 percent of Americans as late as 1968 supported the war.

Why are so many of us uninformed about a relatively recent war? One reason is that Vietnam was such a controversial war, and controversy always

causes us to turn away. By way of contrast, World War II was a popular war. Think of how many battles the average American could name from World War II: Pearl Harbor, D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge, Iwo Jima? Or the Civil War: Gettysburg, Antietam, Vicksburg, Bull Run, Shiloh? How many Americans today could name a single battle from Vietnam? Not many. Another reason for our collective lack of knowledge about Vietnam is that it was a very complicated war. On the one hand it was a civil war; it was also an anti-colonialist war; and it was also a proxy war in the larger Cold War struggle. Another reason Americans know so little about it, of course, is that the United States lost.

Before we go any further in this exploration of Vietnam, let's pause for a moment to set out some objectives for our talk today. In today's lecture, we'll focus on five things: To start, we'll look at the background history of Vietnam that will help explain to us the origins of this conflict that we eventually get embroiled in. Next, we'll examine the first of four key questions about the war: Why get involved? Why did the United States get involved in a tiny little country like Vietnam? Then we'll turn to a second question: Why, after many years of financial and diplomatic assistance, did the United States suddenly commit to a massive military escalation beginning in 1965? From there, we'll go to question number three: Why, after such a huge military buildup, did the United States just as suddenly decide to pull out of Vietnam? Finally, we'll take on the big question, number four: Are there any lessons to learn from the war in Vietnam?

Before we try to answer these questions, let's cover some basic background on Vietnam. Vietnam is located in Southeast Asia. It's slightly larger than the state of New Mexico. From the late 1860s up until 1954, Vietnam was a French colony. But in 1946, right after World War II, Vietnamese nationalists led by a Marxist rebel named Ho Chi Minh launched the First Indochinese War; this was a war to achieve Vietnamese independence, and you may recall from our lecture on the Declaration of Independence, we mentioned Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam Declaration of Independence. In 1954, these Vietnamese rebels defeated the French; and at that point the United Nations stepped in and partitioned the country, making a North and South Vietnam. The justification for this step was that the people of Southern Vietnam favored a more pro-Western form of government—and this was the

part of Vietnam that had been more colonized; more transformed by French colonization—while the people of Northern Vietnam favored a communist form of government. This was the region that was the stronghold of Ho Chi Minh. The partition was supposed to be temporary until elections to choose a new government for a unified Vietnam were held two years later in 1956. But those elections were cancelled out of fear that Ho Chi Minh would win the election; remember, this is the Cold War.

The partition seemed likely to become permanent, and increasingly the United States began to support the government of South Vietnam with money and with military advisors. Four years later, in 1960, the North Vietnamese launched the Second Indochinese War. This was an offensive into the South to reunite the country under one government. Thousands of North Vietnam soldiers forces moved into South Vietnam and engaged in guerilla warfare; acts of sabotage; they spread propaganda among the people and tried to convince them of the need for a unified government; they also assassinated South Vietnamese officials. In these efforts, they were very, very successful; so much so that by 1961, the government of South Vietnam was reeling and in serious danger of actually collapsing. At that point, the United States began to send its first large contingent of military advisors (they already had some there, but now they were really upping the numbers). By 1963, the number of advisors topped 16,000.

Now let's turn to the first of our four questions: Why did the United States get involved in a tiny little country like Vietnam? In the early 1960s, most Americans couldn't even locate Vietnam on a map. Vietnam, as we noted earlier at the beginning of this lecture, is really only a little bit bigger than New Mexico. It also has no major resources like oil. So why did we take such a keen interest in this place? The real question has to do with a number of reasons, and let's break them down. Why did we take Vietnam so seriously? One is remember this is part of the larger Cold War, and there's a doctrine in the Cold War that we talked about earlier called "containment." Beginning in 1947, the United States government adopted a policy of containment, which was defined basically as using American financial and military power to thwart communist expansion anywhere in the world: Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. There was one important dimension, subheading, to containment: the Truman Doctrine. Let's listen to what President Truman

said just to refresh our memory, because we talked about it in our earlier lecture on the Cold War. He said: “I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.” By the mid-1960s, President Lyndon Johnson reiterated this doctrine in the context of Vietnam. Let’s listen to what he had to say: “Our purpose in Vietnam is to prevent the success of aggression. It is not conquest, it is not empire, it is not foreign bases, it is not domination. It is, simply put, just to prevent the forceful conquest of South Vietnam by North Vietnam.”

A second theory was the Domino Theory. The Domino Theory basically argued that if you let one nation fall, you’d start sort of a chain reaction in a region and a series of governments would fall in quick succession. In the mid-1950s, President Eisenhower put it this way when speaking at a press conference in 1954. He said, “You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.” If you let one country fall, you run the risk of a region-wise collapse. By the early 1960s, American policymakers argued that letting little Vietnam fall would trigger a domino effect in this region. First Vietnam, then Cambodia, then Thailand, then Laos, then India; who knows where it would end? Once the United States committed to combat operations in Vietnam a few years later, President Johnson put it in even more dramatic terms. He said, “If we quit Vietnam, tomorrow we’ll be fighting in Hawaii, and [the] next week we’ll have to fight in San Francisco.” He’s saying it’s not only a domino effect in the region but also pretty much a global domino effect; so to prevent all this from happening, we had to make a stand in Vietnam. So went the argument.

The third point: the pressure of domestic anti-communism. Anticommunism in the postwar era, as we talked about in our Cold War lecture, was a major force in American culture and politics. After the rise of Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s, no politician dared to be labeled “soft on communism”; no politician wanted to be blamed for letting the communists gain an edge in the great chess game struggle for influence around the world. President Truman provided a great example of this: In 1949, when America

learned that the pro-U.S. government in China had been overthrown by Mao Zedong's communist rebels, many people blamed Truman for "losing" China. This threat would consume President Johnson as he steered the country into Vietnam. He was obsessed with the fear that he'd be blamed for losing Vietnam; that he'd be the first U.S. president to lose a war.

A fourth reason that explains America's increasing involvement in Vietnam is American idealism and optimism. Since 1898, you'll remember from our lecture on the Spanish American War, Americans believed they could and should promote democracy and human rights around the world. This was why America acted in World War I, World War II, and Korea. Vietnam seemed to many Americans, including President Johnson and some of his key advisors, to fit this standard. South Vietnam, a pro-Western country with a nominally democratic government, faced an invasion from North Vietnam by rebels committed to imposing communist rule. Remember President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address in 1960 in which he pledged in no uncertain terms that the United States was "unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this Nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world." Then Kennedy went further by saying that America was willing to "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

Ok, with these answers to this first question in place—why get involved—now let's turn to our second question: Why, after years of financial and diplomatic assistance, did the United States suddenly commit to a massive military escalation beginning in 1965? Previous U.S. presidents—Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy—had been willing to aid South Vietnam with money and with military equipment and with intelligence; but they were also very wary of getting involved in a ground war there. Then in March, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson decided the time had come to send the first ground troops. By July of that year, there were 75,000 troops in Vietnam and that's when Johnson ordered a major escalation of the number of troops; up to 125,000 with a lot more soon to follow. Johnson put it this way: "Just like the Alamo, somebody damn well needed to go to their aid. Well, by God, I'm going to Viet Nam's aid!" This raises the question: Why did he do it?

On one level, Johnson believed he had no choice. In the Cold War context of the mid-1960s, he believed he'd be vilified by conservatives and cold war hawks if he "lost" Vietnam. Let's listen to how Johnson put it in describing how he felt pressured to act in Vietnam:

If I don't go in [to Vietnam] now and they show later I should have gone, then they'll be all over me in Congress. They won't be talking about my Civil Rights Bill or education or [highway] beautification. No, sir. They'll be pushing Vietnam up my ass every time— Vietnam, Vietnam, Vietnam.

You can see Johnson's passion there; you can also see his penchant for colorful language. Johnson's a smart man, but when he felt strongly about something he often resorted to that kind of colorful language.

A second reason Johnson got us more deeply involved in Vietnam was that Johnson believed he could pull it off. Think about this: The United States possessed the most powerful military machine in the world; and it was inconceivable that it could lose a war to a ragtag collection of poorly-armed North Vietnamese peasants. To reassure the American public that this initial infusion of troops was small and fundamentally just a supporting role, Johnson basically said to Americans, "Don't worry about it. He said: "We are not about to send American boys 9 or 10 thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves." Yes,

And yet, the infusion of American troops proceeded at a rapid pace. By the end of 1965, U.S. troops levels reached 184,000; a year later, 385,000; in 1967, 486,000; in 1968, the peak level, almost 540,000 troops. Then, just as suddenly, the United States began pulling troops out of Vietnam.

This leads to our third main question today: Why, after such a huge military buildup, did the United States just as suddenly decide to pull out of Vietnam? Let's first consider the core elements of the U.S. strategy for Vietnam; basically a three-part strategy: The first part of the strategy was secure South Vietnam's territory; that is, fend off the invasion of the North Vietnamese forces in the south. Second, we needed to stabilize the South Vietnamese government. In order for South Vietnam to survive in the long term it was

essential that we develop a stable government there that was legitimate in the eyes of the South Vietnamese people. Third, the essential part of the war strategy was to maintain domestic support for the war.

By 1968, the U.S. was failing on all three counts. We don't have time here to delve into the deep details of U.S. military strategy and tactics, but the bottom line is the U.S. effort failed to secure South Vietnam's territory; that was the first part of the strategy. The methods that we put into use to secure the territory—these unsuccessful efforts—included napalm, Agent Orange, search and destroy missions, and these alienated the very South Vietnamese population that Americans were trying to save. Second, the strategy failed to stabilize the South Vietnamese government. The Republic of South Vietnam's government was hopelessly unstable; they had eight presidents between 1963 and 1965. This government was also notoriously corrupt, and it inspired very little confidence among the populace; and, in fact, it was, to a degree, an oppressive government. You've probably seen the images of Buddhist monks setting themselves on fire; that's because they were a persecuted group in South Vietnam. Third, the third part of the strategy that failed, was the failure to maintain U.S. domestic support for the war; and here is where we see the great significance of the Tet Offensive as a real turning point in the war and also in American history.

There was by 1966 a growing antiwar movement in the United States; and by 1967, as more activists, journalists, politicians, and college students joined the antiwar movement, it became huge. But overall, the American public was still solidly behind the United States's effort in Vietnam. Polling data tells us that by the beginning of 1968, 50 percent of Americans supported the war, 50 percent were against it; pretty much divided. It's interesting to note at this point how a majority of Americans today think of the Vietnam War, they think that it was intensely unpopular from the get go, from the very beginning, and that's not true. Most Americans believed at the time—as late as 1968—that the U.S. had a duty to protect the free world from communism. Remember our lecture on the Spanish American War: From 1898 onward, many Americans agreed that the United States had an obligation to fight tyranny and promote democracy, whether it was Spanish colonialism, German militarism, Japanese imperialism, Soviet expansionism, or North Korean aggression, the United States should oppose these things. So it

should come as no surprise that support for the Vietnam War remained very high in the first few years of this ground war; and in part, this was due to confidence in the military. Americans knew that we were undefeated in war; and to many American's minds, we had done this just recently. This was a similar scenario to what happened in Korea: the communist North invading the non-communist South, and we intervened there and pushed them out. Many Americans thought we were about to do the same thing in Vietnam.

Another factor that boosted American confidence was the steady stream of assurances from President Johnson and the Pentagon that the U.S. was winning and the war was basically almost over. General William Westmoreland, the man in charge of the war in Vietnam, was also its greatest cheerleader and the person sort of in charge of public relations for it on many occasions. He spoke before the National Press Club in Washington in late 1967 as part of a public relations effort, and he spoke optimistically of the war's imminent end. He said, "With 1968 a new phase is now starting ... we have reached an important point where the end begins to come into view." Then, a few days later on this same publicity tour, on a nationally televised interview: "[We are beginning to see] light at the end of the tunnel." That became a famous phrase as part of this public relations effort. This message was extremely important at this time—this notion that we were about to get out of the war; the war was coming to an end—because the death toll was soaring. By the end of 1968, more than 20,000 American servicemen had died. But despite these reassurances, only a few weeks later a growing segment of the American public would come to a very different conclusion: that light was not at the end of the tunnel.

On January 31, 1968, the North Vietnamese launched the Tet Offensive. It's called the "Tet Offensive" because "Tet" is the Vietnamese word for the New Year; so it was launched essentially on New Year's Eve. The North Vietnamese hoped to catch the South Vietnamese and American forces with their guard down because it was a holiday; and they did, and they launched a massive surprise offensive into South Vietnam. Some 80,000 North Vietnamese troops struck 100 towns and cities including 36 of 44 provincial capitals. As American and South Vietnamese forces scrambled to beat back this offensive, news cameras captured vivid and grim images of the chaos and sent them to the living rooms of millions of American families. These

scenes of destruction—of a powerful enemy on the offensive; an enemy the Americans had been just told was about to crumble—led many Americans to wonder: Are we winning? Were the North Vietnamese really as weak and demoralized as the Pentagon had been saying? In other words, was there really “light at the end of the tunnel,” or was the United States sinking into a quagmire? (This is a word that became a commonplace term in this time.) Was the United States descending into a hopeless war of attrition that it simply could not win?

This eye-opening crisis of public opinion indicates that the Tet Offensive qualifies as a decisive turning point in the war. Public opinion soured on the war. Hearing one thing and seeing another, the American people lost faith in the war effort. Johnson’s approval rating dropped to 35 percent almost overnight. The great irony of the Tet Offensive is this: Tet was the most decisive victory in the war for the United States. That’s right; it’s a victory for the United States. Despite being caught off guard and the initial scenes of chaos, the United States and their South Vietnamese allies decisively defeated the North Vietnamese Tet Offensive. In fact, North Vietnam’s defeat was so decisive it crippled their offensive capability for more than a year. But in wars, especially wars fought by democracies, public opinion on the home front is crucial. In war, perception is almost as important as reality. We talked about this earlier; remember in our lecture about Antietam? Lincoln wrote the Emancipation Proclamation in June, 1862, and he was all set to release it, but he was told to wait; advised to wait for a Union victory—and that didn’t happen until September—before making the proclamation public because they didn’t want a controversial policy like this to be issued at a moment of weakness; they wanted to wait until there was a victory, that way it would look less like a measure of desperation. But the Tet Offensive created the impression that Vietnam was either unwinnable, or if was winnable the cost of that victory would be too costly in terms of blood and treasure.

The Tet Offensive, then, put the U.S. on a course to withdraw from Vietnam. It ramped up the antiwar movement to its highest level yet. Johnson increasingly faced crowds chanting things like, “Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?” Public opinion polls showed that his approval rating began to plummet. It prompted ultimately—the Tet Offensive did—Lyndon Johnson to quit the presidential race and give up a chance at a second term.

Johnson nearly lost the New Hampshire primary to a fellow Democrat Eugene McCarthy—a sort of challenge within his party—and he ultimately decided that if McCarthy came that close to defeating him that he really was not going to win. On March 31, 1968, in a national address, Johnson told the nation, “I shall not seek and I will not accept the nomination of my party for another term as your President.” Who could have imagined just a few years earlier this towering, powerful, supremely confident American president declining a chance at a second term? Vietnam had left Lyndon Johnson a broken man. As he told his aides: “I’m tired. I’m tired of feeling rejected by the American people. I’m tired of waking up in the middle of the night worrying about the war.”

The Tet Offensive also led to the rise of Richard Nixon. That fall in 1968, Richard Nixon was elected on a two-point plan. First point, law and order: If elected, he was going to stop all the rioting in the streets of America. Second, he said he was going to end the war in Vietnam with dignity. The rest of the story of Vietnam basically played out as a painful denouement. In 1969, Nixon ordered the first withdrawal of about 60,000 troops; and by early 1970, the antiwar movement had largely disappeared because it was apparent to everybody that the United States was rapidly withdrawing from Vietnam. The antiwar movement spiked again in May, 1970, after President Nixon announced that the United States forces in Vietnam had invaded neighboring Cambodia; and the purpose of this, Nixon said, was to hit Viet Cong supply lines and safe havens. This round of antiwar protest exploded very briefly, and this was the one that led to the incident at Kent State in Ohio. On May 4, 1970, Ohio National Guard troops opened fire on demonstrators and killed four of them. You’ve probably seen the photograph, the famous photograph, of the young woman kneeling over one of the victims with a look of complete horror on her face. It’s probably one of the most powerful and iconic photographs of this period, and it really conveys to a lot of people the sense that people at the time had that the nation was somehow pulling apart, somehow descending into chaos.

In 1971, the “Pentagon Papers” were released—not by the Pentagon but by the *New York Times*—and this increased pressure for ending the war. There’s a big story here about the Pentagon Papers, but too big for us today. We’ll primarily focus on the impact that they had once they were released. What

were the Pentagon Papers? They were a classified report commissioned by the Pentagon in 1967 to assess the military situation in Vietnam; kind of an internal study. The Pentagon Papers, once they were released, made it very clear that in 1967 and in 1968 the White House and the Pentagon knew that the war was going badly but kept that fact from the public. Remember, in 1967, Johnson and Westmoreland were reassuring the American people that victory was right around the corner; that there was “light at the end of the tunnel.” The Pentagon Papers also revealed a long tradition of secrecy and misinformation from the government regarding Vietnam going way back into the 1950s; and the American people were shocked and angered by these revelations. In the wake of the Pentagon Papers, polls revealed that 66 percent of Americans—two out of three—favored a withdrawal from Vietnam.

At this point, the Nixon administration sped up its policy of de-escalation and withdrawal. They did this on the one hand, but on the other hand they also stepped up the bombing of North Vietnam—they said they wanted to bomb them to the negotiating table—but the bottom line was more troops were being removed. By 1972, only 60,000 troops remained in Vietnam. Nixon kept up the intensive bombing of North Vietnam; and finally, in January 1973, the United States and North Vietnam announced that a peace accord had been reached. It called for a ceasefire and the rapid withdrawal of the last remaining U.S. forces. Essentially, it was a plan that would allow the United States to exit under the pretense of a ceasefire and negotiations; but in reality, both sides knew it was really a hiatus in the war. As soon as the United States was out, everybody assumed North Vietnam would resume its final phase of the war; and, indeed, this happened: In 1974, North Vietnam resumed its military campaign against the South; and in 1975, South Vietnam fell to North Vietnam. We’ve all seen that image of Americans and South Vietnamese refugees climbing aboard helicopters on the roof of the American embassy. For many, it’s the iconic image of a humbled superpower. The United States had lost its first war.

Now let’s turn to our final question: Are there lessons that we can learn from Vietnam? We always want lessons in history; how many times have we heard that phrase, “Those who fail to learn the mistakes of history will be forced to repeat them”? The problem, however, is that different people derive

different, often contradictory lessons from the same historical events. Some Americans today argue that the lesson of Vietnam is that we should never fight a war half-heartedly. The U.S., they say, could have won in this war if its leaders were willing to commit our full military power to the effort. Other Americans take a different view. They argue that the lesson of Vietnam is that we should never get involved in another nation's civil war because we'll lose and in the process we'll violate our ideals; we'll violate our principles of democracy and human rights. Where does this leave us? I think there's one lesson nearly everyone can agree on, and it comes from the experience of the Tet Offensive. This lesson is: A democracy cannot win a long, protracted war without the support of the citizenry. The shock and dismay triggered by the Tet Offensive led to a rapid dissolution of support for the war in Vietnam; and as popular support waned, it became not a matter of if the United States would pull out of Vietnam, but when.

Another lesson suggests that despite noble intentions and unmatched military power, there are limits to what the United States can accomplish in trying to promote American ideals around the world. This lesson relates to the idealism tradition in American internationalism that we've talked about before in previous lectures. Since the late 19th century, Americans have supported military efforts intended to bolster and protect human rights and democracy. In many ways, the war in Vietnam fit this description: The United States went there to bolster human rights and democracy in South Vietnam against a communist insurgency. But we know, despite the best of intentions, how all that turned out.

We'll have to leave it there in this discussion of Vietnam and the Tet Offensive. For our next lecture, we'll explore the story of two environmental disasters and their role in launching the modern environmental movement. Thank you.

1969 Disaster—The Birth of Environmentalism

Lecture 44

On January 28, 1969, a blowout occurred on a Union Oil platform six miles off the coast of Santa Barbara, California. Over the next 10 days, an estimated 80,000–100,000 barrels of oil spilled into the ocean, fouling beaches and killing upwards of 10,000 birds. The extensive news coverage of the ecological disaster prompted leaders of the nascent environmental movement to call for laws to protect the environment and to establish Earth Day on April 22, 1970.

The sanctity of private property had a long tradition in American politics. The fundamental rule of capitalism was the enormous benefits of private property. American law tended toward flexibility on land-use regulation. The downside of this policy, particularly after industrialization, was that there were no legal checks on pollution.

Gradually, Americans came to realize that pollution originating on private property had an impact on the entire community. A debate arose as to how protect the environment and the community that depended on it while respecting private property rights.

Before the 1960s, America's nature lovers were focused on conservation—saving wilderness from development. Then, in 1962, biologist Rachel Carson published her landmark book, *Silent Spring*, describing the impact of the pesticide DDT on wildlife, especially birds, in laymen's terms. Carson's book inspired many Americans to become environmentalists or ecologists, but environmentalism remained a fringe movement.

On January 28, 1968, a blowout on a Union Oil platform spilled 3 million gallons of petroleum into the Santa Barbara Channel. (It should be noted, this was a tiny spill in comparison to the 2010 Gulf of Mexico blowout.) Television and newspapers were filled with images of oil-soaked birds and blackened beaches. The public was outraged with the callousness of Union Oil's president, who said, "I am amazed at the publicity for the loss of a few birds."

A few months later, on June 22, a fire on the Cuyahoga River near Cleveland, Ohio, due to pollution from an oil refinery provoked a similar public reaction. This was far from the Cuyahoga's first fire; in fact, it was the tenth since 1868 and far from the largest. But a *Time Magazine* story about the incident brought attention to the deplorable state of the river, which at some points was utterly devoid of life.

This was a tiny spill in comparison to the 2010 Gulf of Mexico blowout.

The twin impacts of Santa Barbara and Cuyahoga launched the American environmentalist movement. Senator Gaylord Nelson

of Wisconsin proposed the first nationwide environmental protest to “force this issue onto the national agenda.” Earth Day was thus established on April 22, 1970. Some 20 million people participated in rallies, cleanups, and teach-ins. These activities raised public awareness and began to mainstream the idea of environmental protection.

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the most environmental legislation passed in the nation's history, including the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act and the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The 1970 Clean Air Act required factories, power plants, and automobiles to reduce their pollutant output. Recognizing that 30 percent of U.S. drinking water had become unsafe and that masses of wetlands had been lost to development, Congress passed the 1972 Clean Water Act, regulating emissions of toxic substances into waterways. The 1973 Endangered Species Act moved to protect hundreds of species on the verge of extinction, including the bald eagle.

The two main accomplishments of the environmentalist movement have been a cleaner environment and changed public attitudes toward America's natural resources. The Clean Air Act and Clean Water Acts have been huge successes; for example, the smoggiest day in Los Angeles at the start of the 21st century is a fraction of the norm in 1970. The fish are returning to the Cuyahoga River. These strides are thanks not only to government regulation and enforcement but to major, positive changes in public behavior. ■

Suggested Reading

Easton, *Black Tide*.

Kline, *First along the River*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did it take so long for Americans to recognize and take seriously the mounting threats to the environment posed by pollution?
2. How would you assess the modern environmental movement? Has it improved or diminished the quality of life in the United States?

1969 Disaster—The Birth of Environmentalism

Lecture 44—Transcript

Welcome back to another of our explorations of key turning points in American history. Today, we look at two environmental disasters from 1969 that effectively launched the modern environmental movement.

Let's start by looking at another environmental disaster from a slightly earlier period, this time from 1952. In 1952, the Cuyahoga River that runs through Cleveland, Ohio caught fire. That's right, a river caught fire. It was one of the most polluted waterways in the United States; it was literally filled with oil and chemicals. This fire in 1952 caused substantial damage; about \$1.5 million worth, which was a lot of money in 1952. But then in the wake of this fire nothing happened. There was no outrage, no investigation, no legislation; in fact, the Cuyahoga River became more polluted over the next two decades. But then another fire—in fact, a much smaller fire—in 1969 in the same place produced a very different reaction. It was a reaction that announced the beginning of the modern environmental movement.

Before we delve any deeper into this topic, let's pause to set out some objectives. In the course of this lecture on the birth of the modern environmentalism, we'll focus on four things: First, we'll look at the underlying tension between capitalism and republicanism on the one hand and environmentalism on the other. Next, we'll examine earlier environmentalist movements in American history before the 1960s. Then we'll explore the two great disasters in 1969: the Santa Barbara oil spill and the fire on the Cuyahoga River. Then, finally, we'll examine the evolution of the environmental movement that these incidents launched.

Let's start by examining one of the central issues that lies at the heart of the modern environmental movement: the underlying tension between republicanism and capitalism on the one hand and environmentalism on the other. Let's start by considering some of the fundamental values of republicanism. First and foremost is the sanctity of private property. This is the idea that private property was essential to the health and vitality of the republic, and it was one that was widely shared by all the Founding Fathers. They took their cue from philosophers like John Locke. Let's

listen to what John Locke had to say: “The reason why men enter into society is the preservation of their property.” Remember, John Locke was a huge influence on the American Founding Fathers. In the late 18th century, Sir William Blackstone, who was the famous scholar of English law who wrote the famous book *Commentary on the Laws of England*, wrote: “So great moreover is the regard of the law for private property, that it will not authorize the least violation of it; no, not even for the general good of the whole community.” You can see this is a powerful idea. Thomas Jefferson gave expression to it in a letter in 1816. Jefferson wrote: “The true foundation of republican government is the equal right of every citizen in his person and property and in their management.”

This idea—that private property was the foundation of republican liberty—likewise became a central principle of capitalism as it developed in the 19th century. In fact, many Americans in this period came to see republicanism and capitalism as inseparable, and both of them were based on strict notions of private property. Let’s listen to what the great industrialist Andrew Carnegie said; he probably gave it the most succinct definition. Carnegie wrote: “Upon the sacredness of property civilization itself depends.” These words were put in slightly different form by a famous intellectual and writer Walter Lippmann in the early 20th century. He wrote, “Private property was the original source of freedom. It still is its main bulwark.” You get the point: There’s a central connection here with private property; Americans have seen it for a long, long time as central to their political liberty and their economic prosperity. Let’s consider some of the specific virtues of private property that come out of this understanding.

From a republican standpoint, the right of a private citizen to own and control their own private property has long been cited as the surest protection against tyrannical and abusive government. The idea goes that so long as you own your own property and control it free from government interference you have liberty. Or if you put the other way; flip it over and you say: When the government starts meddling with or outright seizing a citizen’s private property, it has become tyrannical and liberty is imperiled. From a capitalist standpoint, private property is hailed as being the foundation of the profit motive; that is, one’s ability to own and enjoy the benefits of private property creates an incentive for them to acquire more private property by working

hard, by innovating, and by taking risks. In keeping with this thinking, the capitalist defense of private property also argues that government meddling with or seizure of private property threatens the health and vitality of the free market economy.

Of course, not everyone in America has subscribed to these views in their entirety; but it's not a stretch to say that most Americans now and going far back into the colonial period have held to this view that private property is fundamentally a good thing. But since the late 19th century, there has developed a critique of the sanctity of private property; and the strand of this thought is what we'll focus on today, the part that focuses on the environment.

As we saw in an earlier lecture on the origins of the national park system, many Americans in the late 19th century began to question the absolutist notion of private property. They noted, for example, that complete and total freedom from regulation left property owners free to engage in strip mining of mountain ranges to get coal, or the clear cutting of forests to harvest lumber. It also left people free to dump their toxic waste in the waterways that ran through their private property or to release them into the air that hovered above their private property, even when this meant that the waste would ultimately end up on someone else's private property. These critics were not anti-capitalist radicals; rather, to make their case they invoked another republican ideal: the common good. They argued that societies and governments need to protect other things besides private property rights, and they noted the uncomfortable fact that sometimes one person's freedom could easily threaten another person's freedom; that the freedom of someone toward their private property might threaten another person's freedom to live free from poisons or pollutants. Or put another way: that individualism and the common good often come into conflict. So these folks developed a philosophy that emphasized what has become a key idea in environmentalism: the idea of connectivity; that people are connected to each other and to the larger ecosystem around them. That one person's actions, therefore, have consequences for others, and this fact needs to be taken into account as societies develop their laws and their public policy regarding the environment and the economy. You can see what I mean by this inherent tension between republicanism and capitalism on the one hand

and environmentalism on the other. It raises a fundamental question: How do we protect the environment and the community that depends on it while at the same time respecting private property rights?

Ok, with this pretty big question hanging in the air, let's now turn our attention to an examination of the key environmentalist moments in American history before the 1960s. As we mentioned in our lecture on the national parks, there were some Americans in the 19th century who began to express concerns about the need to protect the environment; but for most part, their efforts focused on what they called "conservation." This was essentially saving wilderness from development. Men like Theodore Roosevelt, for example, argued that it was essential that we preserve large tracts of wilderness to allow future generations of Americans to enjoy this wilderness by hiking and by camping, two of his favorite pastimes. Few people in the late 19th century and the early 20th century raised much concern at all about water pollution, about air pollution, about endangered species—there were some, but it really was not a mainstream set of concerns—and you may recall from our lecture on the Second Transportation Revolution that when the automobile started to become widely used after 1910, many people hailed the car as a clean technology. That may sound strange to us; but it was a clean technology if you lived in a city where tens of thousands of horses dropped tons and tons of manure and gallons urine on the streets of cities every day. The car was actually much cleaner, until there were a lot more cars and we realized there were other aspects to this equation. So the earliest environmental efforts focused on setting aside more and more wilderness; and Theodore Roosevelt's efforts in this area, as we noted in our lecture on Theodore Roosevelt, are considered by many to be his greatest accomplishment.

There were a few concerns raised over the environment in the early 20th century, particularly after World War II when more and more cars came on the road and big cities began to experience something called "smog," but these were rare and they really were not part of the national conversation. The first significant change in public attitudes concerning the environment came in 1962. This was with Rachel Carson's publication of her book, *Silent Spring*. We might consider this book a kind of pre-turning point in the story of environmentalism. It doesn't trigger the big change in public attitudes, but

it started the conversation, if you will. Who was Rachel Carson? She was a biologist by training who had, by the 1950s, taken to writing as a journalist, mostly about science and the environment, which, at the time, was not exactly popular stuff. But then in 1958 she received a letter, and this letter was from a woman in Massachusetts. This woman described the devastating effects on the birds in her local private bird sanctuary from aerial spraying of something called DDT, a pesticide that was used in mosquito control. This woman asked Carson to use her contacts in Washington, D.C. to find some way to halt the spraying. Carson tried to do this, but she got no one's attention on the matter; but she was concerned about it, so she decided to take on this issue herself. It started as a magazine article for the *New Yorker*, and then quickly blossomed into a full-length book.

Silent Spring, the name of this book, was a detailed and compelling report on the damaging impact of chemicals on the environment. Carson focused especially on this pesticide that we mentioned, DDT. It was widely used throughout the country as a way to control insects, especially mosquitoes. Few Americans had ever heard of DDT, and they'd certainly never seen it. It wasn't like oil flowing into a river or black smoke billowing out of a factory smokestack. DDT was invisible, it was silent, and as Rachel Carson showed, it was deadly. DDT, her research showed, had a devastating impact on wildlife, especially birds. She presented her work—Rachel Carson did—not really as a scientist but in a kind of compelling, emotional way that people could understand, a lot like the muckrakers of the Progressive Era; people like Upton Sinclair, remember how he wrote about the meatpacking industry in his book called *The Jungle*; or Ida Tarbell, who wrote a book about Standard Oil and exposed the illicit practices by that company. Rachel Carson used impassioned prose when she wrote, and she did this to criticize the use of what she called “nonselective chemicals.” Let's listen to what she wrote; sort of a representative passage from this book: Nonselective chemicals, she writes, have:

The power to kill every insect, the “good” and the “bad,” to still the song of birds and the leaping of fish in the streams, to coat the leaves with a deadly film, and to linger on in soil—all this though the intended target may be only a few weeds or insects. Can anyone believe it is possible to lay down such a barrage of poisons on the

surface of the earth without making it unfit for all life? They should not be called “insecticides,” but “biocides.”

You see what I mean about Carson’s muckraking style; very powerful prose. Significantly, Carson anticipated in her writing the private property rights criticism that she knew would come when people read her book, and this is the criticism we noted at the start of this lecture. She said if the Bill of Rights said nothing about protecting citizens from deadly poisons—let’s just listen to what she wrote—she said, “it is surely only because our forefathers, despite their considerable wisdom and foresight, could conceive of no such problem.” She said just because it’s not in the Constitution doesn’t mean that the government must not act. She said the Founding Fathers simply could not have anticipated this problem, so we need to come up with a way to deal with it on our own.

Carson’s book became a bestseller, and it generated in just a few months 50 newspapers editorials and 20 columns, just to give you a measure of the kind of impact it had. Within three months of going on sale, it sold 100,000 copies; and very quickly, in that same time period, more than 40 bills were introduced in state legislatures to control pesticide use, and this was in states all across the country. Another impact of Carson’s book was that it inspired many Americans to become environmentalists, or to use the other term that was a little bit more in vogue in the mid-1960s, “ecologists.” But it’s more important to point out that environmentalism was at this point still a fringe movement; one that was associated with hippies and tree huggers. But the significance of *Silent Spring* is that it planted a seed; a seed that would later blossom with the events of 1969.

Now let’s turn to the story of these two great environmental disasters in 1969 that helped officially launch the modern environmental movement: the Santa Barbara oil spill and the fire on the Cuyahoga River. Let’s start with the Santa Barbara oil spill. This began on January 28, 1969, and it started when a drilling tube that had gone into the ocean floor got stuck; so workers forcefully extracted it out of the mud, and in so doing they inadvertently created five deep gashes on the ocean floor. Over the next few weeks, more than 200,000 gallons of crude oil spilled through these crevices and up onto the surface, into the Santa Barbara channel. It took weeks before workers

could find a way to stop this gusher, and in that time the incident drew significant television and newspaper coverage. Americans at this point—remember by 1969 nearly every American household had a television—began to see for the first time what are now very familiar scenes to us from oil spills: oil-soaked birds (about 10,000 birds were killed in this incident), lots of dead fish, and 30 miles of blackened beaches; what were once beautiful beaches, now turned black by the oil. What’s interesting is that this spill was not especially large, even for that time; and it’s absolutely tiny in comparison to the 2010 spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

But even though it wasn’t that big, the Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969 sparked a widespread outrage across the country about the degrading effects of oil and maybe the unregulated aspect of the oil industry. Many people blamed the fact that the government was not doing enough of a job to oversee and to regulate the offshore drilling. They also—this criticism; this rising chorus of anger—focused on the attitude of the oil executives. The Union Oil president—the president of this company—told a news reporter (he was incredulous by the reaction that came from this oil spill) said, “I am amazed at the publicity for the loss of a few birds.” (Obviously he needed a public relations director, I think.) This statement by him not only tells us a lot about the mentality of oil executives at this time, but also about the power of imagery, particularly in social reform movements. We’ve seen this before. Think about how the abolitionists used images of slave auctions or whippings to stir up antislavery sentiment; or how, in the 1890s Jacob Riis exposed with his camera urban poverty and brought about a lot of changes in urban policy, particularly around housing. A generation later, Lewis Hine exposed child labor with his camera. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement benefitted immensely from photos and from newsreels of the violence as they began their peaceful marches; remember, John F. Kennedy was inspired to sponsor the Civil Rights Act when he saw a picture of a young African American man being bitten by a police dog. The same is true of the antiwar movement and the fact that the scenes from the Tet Offensive convinced a lot of Americans that this was a war that we simply could not win. The bottom line is: Social reform movements need pictures. In 1969, a small environmental movement got their first compelling images from this oil spill in Santa Barbara.

Out of this controversy arose a number of groups committed to environmental activism, including ones that you'll recognize the names; Greenpeace, for example. It also prompted a group of citizens in Santa Barbara to write and issue "The Santa Barbara Declaration of Environmental Rights." You'll see that the Santa Barbara Declaration takes the original Declaration as its model, like so many other groups have done in the past. Let's listen:

All men have the right to an environment capable of sustaining life and promoting happiness. Moved by an environmental disaster in the Santa Barbara Channel to think and act in national and world terms, we submit these charges: We have littered the land with refuse. We have encroached upon our heritage of open space and wildland. We have stripped the forest and the grasses and reduced the soil to fruitless dust. We have contaminated the air we breathe for life. We have befouled the lakes and rivers and oceans along with their shorelines.

This is just a part of the list that goes on, but you get the point; and it sounds like the Declaration of Independence. Let's listen to the second section:

Recognizing that the ultimate remedy for these fundamental problems is found in man's mind, not his machines, we call on societies and their governments to recognize and implement the following principles: We need an ecological consciousness that recognizes man as member, not master, of the community of living things sharing his environment.

That's just a portion of it, but you get the point; very much in that spirit of social reform movement that we've talked about many times.

That same year, Americans learned of another environmental disaster. This time it was a fire on the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio. Cleveland for a long time had been one of the main oil refining centers in America and its waterways showed it. In fact, the Cuyahoga River caught fire many times over its history; this includes fire in 1868, 1883, 1887, 1912, 1922, 1936, 1941, 1948, and 1952, the one we talked about earlier in our introduction. It's caught fire many, many times; and that fire in 1952 we mentioned caused

over \$1 million in damage, which was a lot of money in those days. But it elicited no response; it was just treated as an industrial accident. Seventeen years later, however, another fire on the Cuyahoga—a much smaller fire—produced a very different reaction.

That fire broke out on June 22, 1969. It lasted only 30 minutes. Damage was estimated at about \$50,000; a fraction of the cost of that 1952 fire. But as with the Santa Barbara oil spill 6 months earlier, this fire came with pictures and with film and it captured the attention of the national media. *Time Magazine*, for example, ran a story in its August 1, 1969, issue and it had a statement that went as follows: “Some River! Chocolate-brown, oily, bubbling with subsurface gases, it oozes rather than flows.” A pretty grim description. The writer of this article also went on and told a joke that he had picked up in Cleveland that went as follows: “Anyone who falls into the Cuyahoga does not drown. He decays.” A sort of dark humor, right? The coverage of the fire and the subsequent attention it drew to the dreadful condition of the river led to a famous photo of reporter Richard Ellers holding up his hand after having dunked it in the river, and it looks like it’s been dipped in black paint. It’s an amazing photo if you ever get a chance to see it. The message out of Cleveland was stunning to most people; the message was: The Cuyahoga was a “dead river.” People wondered: Was it really possible to kill a river? Confirmation of this fact came just a year later. In the early 1970s, the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration conducted a study, and they said that, “The lower Cuyahoga has no visible signs of life, not even low forms such as leeches and sludge worms that usually thrive on wastes.”

What was the impact of the Santa Barbara oil spill and the Cuyahoga River fire? These two events helped launch the modern environmental movement, beginning a process that would move environmentalism from the fringes to the center of American society. The news coverage of these incidents inspired a small number of environmental activists to stage what they called “conscience-raising events.” The first major one occurred only months after these two disasters took place, and we know it today as Earth Day. Earth Day had many “fathers”—many people who contributed to its founding—but most people agree that Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin was the key figure in getting the ball rolling when he proposed the first nationwide

environmental protest to, in his words, “shake up the political establishment and force this issue onto the national agenda.”

The idea caught on; and on April 22, 1970, some 20 million Americans participated in the first Earth Day. They held rallies, they conducted cleanups, they also staged teach-ins on college campuses, among many other activities; and one of the most important effects of Earth Day and all the many Earth Days that followed that and got bigger each year was that it brought together lots of disparate groups who shared concerns about the health of the environment. People that were concerned about urban environmental issues; people that were concerned about rural environmental issues; people that were concerned about wildlife and endangered species; there were others who cared about the forest and wetlands; people that were worried about air pollution or water pollution, or toxic landfills and oil spills; all these different interest groups found each other by virtue of Earth Day. Earth Day also raised public awareness of environmental concerns and slowly began to make them mainstream political issues, moving them from the edge to the center. We saw this same process in the social reform efforts of abolition and women’s suffrage. Over time, activists managed to transform their goal from abolishing slavery or giving women the right to vote, which were radical ideas way out on the fringe, and they managed to transform those ideas into mainstream ideas; and that’s what the environmental movement was essentially doing at this moment in the late 1960s/early 70s.

What happened next? Let’s look at how this budding environmental movement began to impact American society in the early 1970s and then beyond. Here’s one way to look at it: The period that we’re talking about, from the late 1960s to the early 70s, saw the most environmental legislation passed in the nation’s history. Let’s look at just a couple of examples of these things: The first one, in 1969, the National Environmental Policy Act. We know this one because it’s one of those acts that has brought something into the lexicon: the “environmental impact statement,” which requires impact statements for large projects to basically explain how they may be affecting the environment.

A second important act in 1970 was the Environmental Protection Act. Let's listen to how this act came to be; it was a particular concern of Richard Nixon. He argued, when he made the case for it:

As concern with the condition of our physical environment has intensified, it has become increasingly clear that we need to know more about the total environment—land, water, and air. ... The Government's environmentally-related activities have grown up piecemeal over the years. The time has come to organize them rationally and systematically.

This environmental message has reached the White House, and the Environmental Protection Agency was established, as was the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; two key environmental organizations. In 1970, the Clean Air Act was passed. This toughened earlier acts that had been passed in the 1960s, and it really came at a time when there were almost no regulations in terms of air pollution from factories, from power plants, and from automobiles. This Clean Air Act soon led to a number of initiatives. One of them was unleaded gasoline; also the introduction of catalytic converters to automobiles in the mid-1970s to reduce emissions; or scrubbers on power plants to reduce the amount of dioxides and things that were going into the atmosphere.

In 1972, the Clean Water Act was passed; and the problem at this time was pretty grim: Only about a third of the nation's lakes, rivers, and waterways were safe for swimming and fishing; and about one-third of U.S. drinking water was unsafe. There were also massive losses of wetlands taking place at this time. So the Clean Water Act established regulations to control the emissions of toxic substances into waterways. Initially this sort of the obvious thing; focused on "point source" pollution, literally stuff emitting from factories. In more recent times, it's focused on "run-off," which is looking at pollution that comes from mining or from agriculture. In 1973, the Endangered Species Act was passed. At the time, there were hundreds of species on verge of extinction; and the best example is the Bald Eagle. It's the nation's symbol, right? As of 1963, there were only 416 pairs of Bald Eagles in the entire country. There were many other examples of animals on the verge of extinction, like wolves, cranes, and so forth.

What's been the impact of the environmental movement since 1969? There have been a couple of accomplishments: One, unquestionably a cleaner environment; and second, a major shift in public attitudes. Let's look at the clean environment; just how clean has the environment become since the 1970s? It's been a huge success. There have been, just to take a couple of examples about emissions: Toxic lead emissions are down 98 percent; sulfur dioxide, 35 percent; carbon monoxide emissions, down 32 percent, and that's even with the huge increase in automobile use. Put another way: The smog problem in Los Angeles today is a fraction of what it was back in 1970.

What about the Clean Water Act? This has also been a huge success. Pollution levels have dropped significantly in many lakes, rivers, and beaches and these places have been reclaimed for public; about two-thirds of them now across the country are now safe and clean. 175 million Americans are served by water treatment plants. What about that example we've used a couple times, the Cuyahoga River? Is there a "rest of the story" here? There is: In 1969, researchers found 10 fish, total. That's it; 10 fish in the entire Cleveland area on the Cuyahoga. In 2009, another study was conducted and they found huge numbers of fish; 40 varieties of fish in large numbers. Since the late 1960s, there's been a slow and steady return of fishing, tourism, and recreation on the waterfront of that river. What about the Endangered Species Act? At the time, we noted that there were hundreds of endangered species; the Bald Eagle was the best example. What happened to the Bald Eagle? In 1963, there were 416 pairs of eagles known; in 2010, there are 9,800 pairs and the number is growing. There are many other success stories. The Peregrine Falcon, for example: There were only 324 pairs of Peregrine Falcons in 1974; there were 1,700 by the year 2000 and that number has continued to grow.

What about the change in public attitudes? In some ways, this is the more significant accomplishment. As we've noted earlier, just like the abolitionists and the suffragists, environmentalists managed to move their issue from the fringe into the center; and polling data tells us that this has happened. In 1989, a Gallup Poll revealed that 72 percent of Americans were worried about pollution in rivers, lakes, and reservoirs. These numbers have declined a little bit in polling data since that time, but it's not clear why. Some people think it's because many Americans believe we've solved a lot of these problems,

so their concerns are diminished; not that they don't care anymore. To a large extent, the change in attitudes among Americans reflects the growing acceptance of three broad principles that the environmental movement has been pushing since the early 1970s; and these were first articulated by an environmentalist named Barry Commoner in the early 1970s. In a famous article of his, he argued three points: Point number one, connectivity (we mentioned this earlier); everything in the environment is connected to everything else. People are connected to animals and plants, and so forth. Second, waste: Everything we generate has to go somewhere, and that has to be part of the equation. Third, consequences and costs: Production and consumption carry costs and consequences and we must factor those into our policies.

We can see how these broad ideas have shaped public attitudes and led to changing behavior among Americans. More Americans now than ever before recycle. These ideas have also led to changing views on the issue of private property and the sanctity of private property. While most Americans still revere private property, more and more Americans are now willing to support some level of government regulation for this broad idea of the common good. We've seen this over the years many, many times over with laws requiring corporations to clean up hazardous waste sites; or that companies need to remove lead paint or asbestos; or, in the 1970s, the banning of CFCs from aerosol spray cans. Again, we're talking about support for some intervention; there's no shortage of public battles over proposed environmental legislation, especially over contentious issues like global warming and climate change, suburban sprawl, and genetically-modified food. As a society dedicated to consumption, it remains an open question about just how far Americans are willing to go to change their lifestyles to meet the demands of the modern environmental movement.

That's all for now in this discussion of the rise of modern environmentalism. For our next lecture, we'll head for Washington, D.C. to plunge into one of the greatest political scandals in American history: Watergate. See you then.

1974 An Age of Crisis—Watergate

Lecture 45

In an age of crisis, the Watergate Scandal, which revealed illegal and unethical activities within the Nixon administration, was a particularly sharp blow to America's self-confidence. Many historians refer to the 1970s as the age of limits, when Americans finally had to accept that their political system contained flaws and that there were limits to its power and influence. Yet by decade's end, Ronald Reagan's rise to the presidency in 1979–1980 was propelled by his assertion that "America's best days lie ahead."

The presidential election of 1972 would go down as one of the most lopsided in American history. But even as the election returns were coming in, Nixon's legacy was beginning to unravel. Just 21 months later, Richard Nixon would become the first and only U.S. president to resign from office.

Having lost a previous presidential bid and a run for California governor, Nixon's presidential victory in 1968 was one of the great comebacks in U.S. political history. His platform promised a return to law and order in an age of rising crime and a dignified withdrawal from the Vietnam War.

Nixon's first term as president was marked by a number of significant successes, from his visit to the People's Republic of China to the enactment of landmark environmental bills. In mid-1972, he enjoyed an approval rating of 62 percent. But Nixon was also a profoundly paranoid man who surrounded himself with advisors who shared his fears.

The event that set Nixon on the path to self-destruction was the 1971 leak of the Pentagon Papers—a damning status report on the state of the Vietnam War. Nixon ordered his staffers to draw up an "enemies list" and to use the IRS and FBI, in the words of White House counsel John Dean, to "screw" them. Nixon's Committee to Re-Elect the President, or CREEP, began using shady tactics to raise money for Nixon's re-election effort. One of these

tactics was to steal files and plant bugs at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate office and hotel complex.

The CREEP operatives were caught during the break-in on June 16, 1972. Nixon quickly moved to cover up his involvement. He told the FBI to stop investigating the case for national security reasons and paid the Watergate burglars hush money.

In August, two *Washington Post* reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, began publishing a series of articles about the break-in, based on leads they had received from a key Washington insider known to them only as Deep Throat. (Deep Throat revealed himself as Mark Felt, former associate director of the FBI, in 2005.) Nixon's involvement was not discovered until after the 1972 election.

In early 1973, several White House staffers were arrested, and on May 18, the Senate Watergate Committee began nationally televised hearings. By



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The infamous Watergate building in Washington DC has become synonymous with presidential scandal.

some estimates, as many as 85 percent of Americans tuned in for at least part of them.

Alexander Butterfield, Nixon's former appointments secretary, revealed that Nixon had recorded all conversations and telephone calls in his offices since 1971. Nixon refused to turn over the tapes, citing national security and executive privilege, then fired special prosecutor Archibald Cox, the man in charge of the investigation, causing national outrage and convincing most Americans that Nixon had something to hide.

Nixon refused to turn over the tapes, citing national security and executive privilege ... convincing most Americans that Nixon had something to hide.

On July 24, 1974, the Supreme Court ruled that Nixon must turn over the tapes. The House Judiciary Committee passed the first article of impeachment against Nixon, and Nixon finally complied. A few days

later, investigators found a recording of Nixon authorizing his chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, to order the FBI to back off the case and to pay hush money to the burglars. Five days later, on August 8, 1974, Richard Nixon became the first U.S. president to resign from office.

One of the most important things about the Watergate scandal is the context in which it took place—an economic downturn, the humiliation of Vietnam, and an oil crisis—which may have magnified its impact. It certainly changed the role of the media in American politics, legitimizing hard-hitting investigative journalism into the activities of politicians. It also damaged Americans' trust in their elected officials, especially the president, and to a certain extent in democracy itself.

On a positive note, Watergate demonstrated that the Constitution works: Congress and the Supreme Court were able to check executive power through peaceful means. ■

Suggested Reading

Emery, *Watergate*.

Woodward and Bernstein, *All the President's Men*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you agree with some biographers and historians who argue that Nixon was a victim of his inner demons, much like a figure in a Greek tragedy?
2. Watergate changed the role of the press in American life, especially in politics. Has this change been mostly for the good or for the bad?

1974 An Age of Crisis—Watergate

Lecture 45—Transcript

Hello again. Welcome back. It's time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Today, we look at one of the great political crises in American history: the famous Watergate scandal that led to the downfall of President Richard Nixon.

Let's begin on election night, 1972. On November 7, 1972, President Nixon watched the election returns come in with great satisfaction. As the polls predicted, he was trouncing his Democratic opponent George McGovern. Indeed, the election of 1972 would go down as one of the most lopsided in American history. Nixon won 61 percent of the vote and 49 of 50 states. Nixon had received a powerful mandate to continue his policies, especially in the realm of foreign affairs, for a second term.

But even as the election returns were coming in, Nixon's legacy was already beginning to unravel; for in one of the greatest exhibitions in self-destruction ever witnessed in American history, Nixon and dozens of key operatives and advisors in the Republican Party spent most of 1972 engaged in a huge web of illegal activity to ensure Nixon's reelection. Of course, the great irony of all this is that Nixon needed none of this; the election was his for the taking. The Republican Party had boatloads of money and he had rung up a string of foreign policy successes, not the least of which were his historic visit to China in February, 1972, and also the signing of a nuclear weapons treaty with the Soviet Union in May, 1972. By all accounts, McGovern never stood a chance in this election. But, like a character in a Greek tragedy, Nixon had a deep and fatal flaw that eventually did him in. In spite of all his successes, there ran within Richard Nixon a deep vein of paranoia; the unrelenting fear that his enemies were plotting to destroy him. This mindset led him to justify a wide range of questionable and illegal activities that led to a break-in into the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate Hotel and office complex in Washington, D.C., and then the subsequent effort to cover it up. Twenty-one months later, after a wrenching constitutional crisis, Nixon would become the first and only president to resign from office.

Before we go any further with this story, let's establish our objectives for this lecture. We'll focus on four primary things: First, we'll chart the rise of Richard Nixon. Then, we'll examine the story of the Watergate break-in itself. From there, we'll explore the nearly year-and-a-half-long investigation into the Nixon White House and the Republican Party that eventually forced Richard Nixon to resign. Finally, we'll examine the legacy of the Watergate scandal to see how it led to a number of profound changes in American politics.

Ok, let's start by charting the rise of Richard M. Nixon. Nixon was without a doubt one of the most fascinating figures in American history, or at least in the 20th century. Nixon was a self-made man. He was born in 1913 in Yorba Linda, California. His father was a smalltime lemon farmer who also owned a small grocery store. Despite his humble origins and the onset of the Great Depression, Nixon graduated from college in 1934 and then he went to law school and earned his law degree. For a while, he practiced law; but then in World War II he joined the Navy. After the war, in 1946, Nixon left the Navy to run for Congress as a Republican, and he ended up winning that election. Nixon soon joined gained a significant amount of national attention during the red scare of the late 1940s when he joined the House Un-American Activities Committee. This reputation as a dogged anticommunist in the early years of the Cold War led to Nixon's being named the vice presidential running mate with Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952.

After eight years as vice president, Nixon won his party's nomination for president in 1960. Nixon ended up losing that contest to John F. Kennedy in one of the closest elections in American history; by about 100,000 votes. Two years later, in an attempt to position himself for another run for President, Nixon ran for governor of California. But he ended up losing that election, and a lot of people at that point said, "Nixon's finished politically." You probably remember his famous, self-pitying speech in which he told the press they "wouldn't have Dick Nixon to kick around anymore." And yet, just six years later, in one of the great comeback stories in American political history, Nixon won the Republican nomination for President.

Nixon won the subsequent election by pledging to do two things: First, he'd bring about a return to "law and order" at a time when crime was on the

rise and major riots were rocking American cities. Second, he'd end the war in Vietnam "with honor." Nixon's first term as President was marked by a number of significant successes, especially in the realm foreign affairs. By 1972, the U.S. troop presence in Vietnam had declined all the way down to 60,000; just a tiny fraction of the almost 540,000 that were there 1968. Then, in 1972, Nixon stunned the nation and the world by making a historic trip to China. That same year, pursuing the policy of *détente*, Nixon also reached a historic agreement with the Soviet Union to reduce nuclear weapons. Both sides ending up signing the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in May, 1972. Nixon was enjoying tremendous success; he had always considered himself a foreign policy president. On the domestic front Nixon had some success—not as much, but some success—and part of what was holding him back a little bit was a fairly weak economy at the time. But nevertheless, he managed to sign into law a number of landmark bills: the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration Act. By mid-1972, Nixon enjoyed an approval rating of 62 percent; so he was riding high in an election year.

But a closer look at his first term reveals the seeds of Nixon's eventual destruction. Nixon, as we mentioned earlier, was a profoundly paranoid man. Despite his successes, he believed that all around him were enemies, plotting to ruin him. To make matters worse, Nixon surrounded himself with men who shared this outlook, people like Charles Colson, who worked as Special Counsel to the President; John Mitchell, who was the Attorney General; H. R. Haldeman, who was White House Chief of Staff; and John Ehrlichman, who was Chief Domestic Advisor. These men sort of fed Nixon's paranoid vision of the world.

The event that sent Nixon on his path, sort of set him on the road to self-destruction, was the release of the Pentagon Papers in 1971. Back in 1967, within the Pentagon there was a study commission, basically a status report on the Vietnam War, and these came to be called the "Pentagon Papers." This study revealed that despite the rosy pronouncements that were coming from the Johnson administration in late 1967/early 1968 that the war essentially over—there was light at the end of the tunnel—the military, these reports indicated, knew that the war was going badly. The release of this report in 1971 by former Pentagon analyst Daniel Ellsberg infuriated Nixon and led

his staffers to draw up an “enemies list” of 300 people in the press, the entertainment industry, and the Democratic Party. On this list, they included people like Senator Ted Kennedy, a journalist named Daniel Shore, and the actress Jane Fonda.

The purpose of this enemies list, observed White House counsel John Dean, was—let’s listen to what he said, because it’s worth hearing—a very honest statement of what this was all about. Dean said: “How [can we] maximize the fact of our incumbency in dealing with persons known to be active in their opposition to our administration[?] Stated a bit more bluntly, how can we use the available federal machinery [by which he meant the IRS and FBI] to screw our political enemies?” The enemies list, in combination with using the FBI and other agencies in the government, was going to be to put the hammer to Nixon’s enemies; protect him and take out his enemies. Nixon also, in addition to drawing up this enemies list, authorized the creation of a special intelligence unit headed by former CIA operative Howard Hunt and former FBI agent G. Gordon Liddy. This group was nicknamed “the plumbers,” since one of their primary goals was to plug any information leaks going to the press.

As the election year of 1972 approached, a group known as the Committee to Re-Elect the President—often known by its rather revealing and somewhat unfortunate name, at least by public relations standpoint, CREEP—began to raise large amounts of money for the Nixon reelection effort. They also, in the spirit of Nixon’s administration, planned and carried out a lot of “dirty tricks” against their Democratic opponents. One of these involved a break-in into the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee offices at the Watergate office and hotel complex in Washington.

Now let’s turn to the story of this break-in itself. These burglars, funded by CREEP, had two goals: First, they wanted to plant listening devices in the headquarters of the DNC (Democratic National Committee) to listen in on their discussions. Second, they wanted to steal files, steal any information that they could get their hands on that might be useful in their dirty tricks campaign; embarrassing information, so to speak. On the evening of June 16, 1972, five men broke into the DNC offices at the Watergate Hotel. They were discovered when a security guard found tape placed over the locking

mechanism on the doors so they wouldn't lock behind them, and these were the doors that lead into the DNC offices. The security guard assumed something nefarious was going on; he didn't know what. He called the police; the police showed up, arrested the five burglars and thus set in motion the series of events that would take down Nixon.

Nixon at this point had a choice; remember we always say history is the study of choices. One choice, once it became evident that there were ties between these burglars and this organization called CREEP, he could take an embarrassing hit when the news came out that there were these ties and admit it, and then just deal with it and hopefully the incident would be behind him before long; or, Nixon could launch a cover-up that would try to make the whole thing disappear, make it all go away by covering it up. As it turned out, Nixon chose the latter. One June 23, just a week after the break in, Nixon ordered his special assistant H. R. Haldeman to tell the FBI to stop investigating the case and make the point that the pretext was that this was national security; that they should back off in the name of national security. Nixon also authorized the payment of initial hush money—some \$400,000—to keep the arrested Watergate burglars and their superiors silent. Both of these steps were clear acts of obstruction of justice, and they would be among the decisions that would eventually come back to bring Nixon down. But in the short run, the cover up worked.

There were a few revelations that appeared in the press; remember, this was an election year. For example, on August 1, 1972, the Washington Post reported that a cashier's check for \$25,000 that had been intended to go into the Nixon reelection campaign fund had been found deposited in the bank account of one of the Watergate burglars. Hmm. Then on October 10, 1972, the Washington Post reported that the FBI had determined that the Watergate break in was part of a much larger—a massive campaign—of political spying and sabotage being conducted on behalf of Nixon's reelection campaign. These and other stories were filed by two Washington Post reporters, one named Carl Bernstein, the other Robert Woodward. Already they were hard at work trying to connect the dots of this complex mystery that led in all sorts of directions and seemed to involve all kinds of organizations and people: the FBI, the White House, CREEP, the Republican Party, and Cuban nationals, just to name a few. Already they'd begun to receive vital leads,

vital tips, from a key Washington insider whose identity was kept secret; he only went by the code name “Deep Throat.” That source’s true identity would remain secret—one of the great secrets in modern American political history—for 30 years longer until May, 2005, when a man named Mark Felt, who at the time was the Associate Director of the FBI, revealed that he was the source known as “Deep Throat.” But Woodward and Bernstein’s investigation had only begun in the summer and fall of 1972 and none of their initial revelations pointed directly to President Nixon. So on November 7, 1972—we’ve already mentioned this—Nixon won the election in a landslide and things seemed to be going just great for Nixon. But soon the wheels would start to come off the Nixon administration in its efforts to stymie the investigation and suppress the story.

On January 30, 1973, just 10 days after Nixon took the oath of office for a second time, former Nixon aides G. Gordon Liddy and James McCord, Jr. were convicted of conspiracy, burglary, and wiretapping in the Watergate break in. Five other men involved in this also plead guilty. Maybe, Nixon and his aides thought, that might be the end of it; this thing may indeed go away. Maybe the cover-up would work. But then, on March 19, 1973, James McCord—one of these men found guilty—wrote a letter to the judge involved in the case, Judge Sirica, indicating that he had committed perjury in his testimony and he had done so because of intense pressure from CREEP, the Committee to Re-Elect the President, and that the Watergate break in was part of a large and vast conspiracy. Six weeks later, as it became increasingly clear that more and more people were looking into the Watergate incident, including Congress, Nixon’s top White House staffers—H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, and Attorney General Richard Kleindienst—resigned; and then the White House fired its counsel, John Dean. On May 18, 1973, the Senate Watergate Committee began nationally televised hearings. The next day, a man named Archibald Cox was named by the Justice Department to act as a special prosecutor, an independent prosecutor, into this now-ballooning scandal.

Now at this point let’s examine the nearly year-and-a-half-long investigation into the Nixon White House and the Republican Party that eventually forced Nixon to resign. Remember in those days there were no 24-hour news channels, there was no Internet, so just three major networks; and they

decided to take turns broadcasting the hearings that, of course, were taking place mostly during the day. By some estimates, as many as 85 percent of Americans tuned in for at least part of the hearings. Initially, the revelations came fast and furious. On June 3, former White House counsel John Dean told Watergate investigators that he had personally discussed the Watergate cover up with President Nixon at least 35 times. Ten days later on June 13, Watergate prosecutors discovered a memo addressed to John Ehrlichman that detailed the plans to break into the office of the Pentagon Papers defendant Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist; so they wanted to get the goods on Ellsberg by breaking into his psychiatrist office and taking his secret files, basically to discredit him. Then on July 16, testimony by Alexander Butterfield, the former presidential appointments secretary, revealed that Nixon had recorded all conversations and telephone calls into his office since 1971. Nixon—once this was made public they clearly wanted these tapes—refused to turn over the tapes to the investigating committee, and he cited (not surprisingly) national security and executive privilege.

To give you a sense of how potentially damning these tapes were I want to play you an excerpt from one of them. The sound on these tapes is a little muddy, but I think you can make out what's being said. In case you need a little help, you can refer to the transcript in your course booklet, and we'll also put what's being said up onscreen. In the first part, you're going to hear White House counsel John Dean explain to Nixon the need to raise hush money to deal with the problem of blackmail from people that already know about the break-ins. Let's listen:

John Dean: [T]here's the problem of the continued blackmail ...

President Nixon: Right.

John Dean: ... which will not only go on now, it'll go on when these people are in prison, and it will compound the obstruction-of-justice situation. It'll cost money. It's dangerous. ... [P]eople around here are not pros at this sort of thing. This is the sort of thing Mafia people can do: washing money, getting clean money, and things like that. ... It's a tough thing to know how to do. ... Plus, there's a real problem in raising money. Mitchell has been working

on raising some money. ... But there's no denying the fact that the White House and Ehrlichman, Haldeman, and Dean are involved in some of the early money decisions.

President Nixon: How much money do you need?

John Dean: I would say these people are going to cost a million dollars over the next two years.

Ok, so far that's pretty bad; but here's, as it were, the "smoking gun." Let's listen as Nixon, who's been mainly silent up until now, suggests that he could actually be of help in raising that million dollars.

President Nixon: We could get that.

John Dean: Mm-hmm.

President Nixon: If you—on the money, if you need the money, I mean, you could get the money fairly easily.

John Dean: Well, I think that we're ...

President Nixon: What I meant is, you could get a million dollars. And you could get it in cash. I know where it could be gotten.

John Dean: Mm-hmm.

You can hear for yourself how these tapes could show that Nixon was fully aware of the break in and actively involved in actually covering it up; and for the next few months, these tapes were the main focus of public attention.

In a separate but damaging incident, Vice President Spiro Agnew had to resign in October of that year in the wake of corruption allegations relating to his time as governor of Maryland; so things were really going badly for the administration. Nixon had to then name a new vice president, and he chose Gerald Ford to replace Agnew. Days later, during the Watergate investigation, it leapt back into the headlines when on October 20, 1973,

an incident occurred that was called “The Saturday Night Massacre.” That night, Nixon fired the special prosecutor Archibald Cox, the independent prosecutor who was in charge of investigating the Watergate incident. Attorney General Elliot Richardson and Deputy Attorney General William D. Ruckelshaus resigned rather than carry out the firings. The firing of Cox caused national outrage, and poll after poll indicated that a majority of Americans had come to believe that Nixon had something to hide. Members of Congress now began to speak openly of impeachment.

For the next few months, the Watergate investigations resulted in dozens of indictments for perjury and for obstruction of justice with people involved with CREEP, the White House, and the Republican Party. But the main focus of the investigation remained on the legal struggle over the tapes. On April 30, 1974, in an attempt to appease the demand for the tapes, the White House released 1,200 pages of heavily edited transcripts of the Nixon tapes; but the Judiciary Committee insisted that the actual tapes must be handed over. The matter was finally decided in late July, 1974, by the Supreme Court. The Court rejected the President’s claims of executive privilege and ruled unanimously in the case *United States v. Nixon* that the President must turn over the tapes. Three days later, on July 27, 1974, the House Judiciary Committee passed the first article of impeachment against Nixon, charging him with obstruction of justice. Two more articles were passed in the coming days, charging abuse of executive power and contempt of Congress.

On July 30, Nixon finally turned over the tapes; and it took investigators very little time to uncover a document they called the “smoking gun.” On August 5, they released a transcript of a White House meeting that took place back on June 23, 1972, just days after the Watergate break in; and in this, President Nixon clearly authorized the Chief of Staff, H. R. Haldeman, to order the FBI to back off the case and to pay hush money to the burglars involved in the break in. Five days later, on August 8, Richard M. Nixon became the first U. S. president to resign. Let’s listen to how he put this moment into words. In a nationally televised address, Nixon said:

I have never been a quitter. To leave office before my term is completed is abhorrent to every instinct in my body. But as President, I must put the interest of America first. America needs

a full-time President and a full-time Congress, particularly at this time with problems we face at home and abroad.

Then Nixon went on to say that if he stayed in office, there would simply be a long and drawn out impeachment process; and this:

would almost totally absorb the time and attention of both the President and the Congress in a period when our entire focus should be on the great issues of peace abroad and prosperity without inflation at home. ... Therefore, I shall resign the Presidency effective at noon tomorrow. Vice President Ford will be sworn in as President at that hour in this office.

Vice President Ford took over for President Nixon, making him the first unelected President in U.S. history; remember, Nixon had appointed him Vice President just eight months earlier.

Nixon's resignation, although expected, nonetheless left the nation in kind of a state of shock. Then, on September 8, 1974—just a month after Nixon resigned—President Ford stunned the nation by granting a full pardon to Nixon for all the charges related to the Watergate case; and Ford believed it was in the best interest of the nation to put the Watergate scandal behind it. As he explained, "It could go on and on and on, or someone must write the end to it. I have concluded that only I can do that and if I can, I must." Many Americans reacted angrily to the news; they argued that Nixon should have had to pay the consequences for his illegal actions. Others said at the very least, pardoning maybe wasn't such a bad idea but it should have waited until Nixon had been tried and convicted, then pardon the President to spare the nation any more agony. Some people have charged that there must have been a secret deal, one hatched between Nixon and Ford. Nixon, the conspiracy theory went, agreed to name Ford as his vice president in exchange for a promise that Ford would pardon Nixon if he ever faced prosecution. This is a wonderful theory, but there's no evidence that's ever been produced to support this theory. But the whole affair—the whole Watergate affair and the subsequent pardon—shook the confidence of the American people in their political leaders.

Ok, so how was this scandal a key turning point in American history? One of the most important things about Watergate in trying to sort of understand its importance is to remember the context in which it took place. Even without the downfall of President Nixon, the mid-1970s marked a time of profound despair and anxiety in American life. The economy, just to take one example, after 25 years of explosive growth after World War II, began to sputter in the early 1970s. America's economy faced greater foreign competition, and it also was experiencing deindustrialization, creating something we'd later call the "Rust Belt." There also was the problem of high inflation. That's one problem, the economy. The second problem: humiliation in Vietnam. In 1965, the United States sent its first ground troops into South Vietnam to prevent it from falling to an invasion by communists from North Vietnam. Ten years later, in the middle-1970s, after losing 58,000 soldiers, billions of dollars, and an unmeasurable amount of international credibility, the United States witnessed the fall of Saigon and the eventual merger of North and South Vietnam into one country. A third problem: In the midst of all this, in 1973 a group of oil-producing Arab countries decided to punish the United States for its support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War of that year, 1973, by cutting off all shipments of oil.

Now let's consider the impact of a major constitutional scandal in the midst of these three other developments: economic downturn, failure in Vietnam, and the oil crisis. Watergate, in other words, could not have occurred at a worse time; and this fact may have ended up magnifying the significance of the scandal.

So with this tumultuous context in mind, what was the long-term impact of the Watergate break in on American history? How did it mark a turning point in American history? It did so in a number of small ways: For one, it ended the practice—so far as we know—of presidents recording their conversations in the White House; no one is going to do that anymore. It also led to laws requiring high-ranking government officials to disclose personal financial information; that's why they're often required to release their tax returns. Third, it also led to important revisions in the Freedom of Information Act, allowing greater access to government documents by the media and by individual citizens. It also, to many people's annoyance, has led to the appending of the word "gate" onto the end of any subsequent

political scandal, no matter how big or how small; many people find that very annoying.

But Watergate led to two interrelated major changes in American politics: First, Watergate changed the role of the media in American politics. As late as 1972, the American press still operated under unwritten codes that basically placed limits on what was deemed acceptable topics for them to pursue and to cover. Many reporters in Washington, D.C. as late as the late 1960s knew about extramarital affairs various presidents, but it was understood that no one would ever report on such matters. But the central role played by investigative journalists in uncovering the Watergate scandal—especially after the release of a blockbuster book and movie *All the President's Men*; the movie starred Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford as Carl Bernstein and Robert Woodward—legitimized hard-hitting investigative journalism into the activities of politicians. The proliferation of news media sources on cable TV and the Internet in recent years has only served to increase the scrutiny of journalists into the lives of politicians, not only their public lives but their private lives as well. While investigative journalism has no doubt—we know this—led to the uncovering of corruption and misdeeds by elected officials, it has also fostered, I think it's fair to say, a climate of pessimism and cynicism in American life and among the American public.

Watergate also destroyed Americans' trust in their elected officials, especially the President. In the 1950s and 60s, 70 percent of Americans told pollsters that they trusted the government to do what was right. That number actually peaked in 1964 at 76 percent; three out of four Americans trusted their politicians. Vietnam caused that number to really decline because people lost trust in the government, but Watergate caused public trust to plummet well below 50 percent and to stay there for more than two decades. Trust bumped up a little bit after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, but then it soon slid back down below 50 percent, where it remains. Watergate alone did not cause this rapid drop in public confidence; much of it was also driven by continued economic instability, anxiety over national security, and lots of other political scandals that have occurred—the Iran-Contra affair in the 1980s during the Reagan administration; the Monica Lewinsky affair during the Clinton administration—but it's fair to say that the Watergate scandal marked the turning point when the average American suffered a

significant loss of confidence in their elected leaders and, to a certain extent, in democracy itself. This is not necessarily an irreversible loss of confidence, but it certainly has been an enduring one.

I think we'll all agree that this is a pretty depressing way to end a lecture; so let's ask a question: Is there anything positive to be drawn from Watergate? Yes, there is, actually. As ugly and unwieldy as the process was at times, the Watergate scandal proved and demonstrated that the Constitution worked. Congress and the Supreme Court were established to act as a check on executive power; and in the process of exposing the abuses of the Nixon White House, they fulfilled that obligation and—narrowly, to be sure—averted a disastrous constitutional crisis.

We'll have to leave it there in this discussion of Watergate. For our next lecture, we'll head into very different territory in examining the birth of the personal computer, a device that soon revolutionized American life. Thank you.

1975 The Digital Age—The Personal Computer

Lecture 46

Computers began playing a significant role in the military, science, and business as early as the 1940s, but the advent of the personal computer in the 1970s truly transformed American life. In 1977, three companies released the first successful personal computers: The Commodore PET, the Apple II, and the Tandy TRS-80. As the technology improved and computers became more common in schools, offices, and homes, they radically changed the way Americans work, shop, communicate, research, and play.

The January 1975 issue of *Popular Electronics* hit the newsstands with the astonishing headline: “World’s First Minicomputer Kit to Rival Commercial Models ... ALTAIR 8800.” This unassuming machine was soon to catch the eye of Paul Allen, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Steve Wozniak and jump-start a computer revolution.

Technically speaking, a computer is any machine that accepts, stores, manipulates, and processes data to generate useful output. This includes such ancient devices as the abacus and Renaissance inventions like the slide rule. The Victorians invented punch-card calculating machines, and the first programmable computers were developed by IBM in the late 1930s. World War II accelerated computer development for military applications, from calculating artillery trajectories to breaking enemy codes.

The world’s first true all-purpose electronic computer was the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer (ENIAC), completed in 1943. This 30-ton machine consisted of 19,000 vacuum tubes, 6,000 switches, and required an army of attendants to hand-program it by manually flipping switches and plugging cables.

The transistor (Bell Labs, 1947) and the integrated circuit (Texas Instruments, 1958) made computers smaller and faster, but they were still expensive and exclusive to government, universities, and some big businesses. Finally, in 1971 Intel debuted the first microprocessor (the Intel 4004), and the first

microcomputer kits—which used the Intel 8080 chip—were sold to the public in 1974. These were just prototypes, and no one was quite sure what they would be good for. Within a decade, everything would have changed.

The first usable personal computer was created in Northern California by Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs, members of a hobbyist group called the Homebrew Club. They developed their own circuit board and used the club to show off their work and elicit feedback. They named their refined board the Apple I and began selling it on April 1, 1976. Overwhelmed by quick

success, they developed a fully usable computer with a monitor and keyboard within the next year and began selling it as the Apple II.

The Mac's success compelled all the other manufacturers and software designers to develop user-friendly machines as well.

The success of the Apple II and its competitors brought IBM into the personal computer industry. IBM hired Bill Gates and Microsoft

to develop an operating system for their machine. Gates actually bought another programmer's software and modified it to fit IBM's specifications, calling it MS-DOS (for Microsoft Disk Operating System). Then, in what is now considered IBM's biggest blunder and Gates's wisest move, Gates licensed the software to IBM, rather than sell it outright. This allowed him to re-license the software to other manufacturers who were imitating IBM's open-source hardware, companies such as Dell, Compaq, and Gateway.

In 1979, Apple began developing a “user-friendly” personal computer—that is, they changed the computer to suit the human, rather than expecting the human to learn complicated computer operations. The result was the Apple Macintosh and several features we now take for granted: a graphical user interface featuring icons and windows, controlled by a mouse. The Mac's success compelled all the other manufacturers and software designers to develop user-friendly machines as well. As computers became easier to use, more powerful, more versatile, and less expensive, their popularity soared.

The Internet was born in 1969 as ARPANET, the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, which linked four major research universities: UCLA, UC

Santa Barbara, Stanford, and the University of Utah. It was used exclusively by a small number of elites and academics until the introduction of the Mosaic graphical web browser in 1993.

The personal computer not only launched an entire industry; it changed virtually every business in America, from retail to publishing to government to medicine to education. It has changed

how we communicate with e-mail, text messaging, and social networking. It expanded our access to information, giving traditional media like books, newspapers, and television a new way to reach users while creating new outlets like blogs as well. As with any new technology, the revolution has had its downside, from identity theft to the hectic, distracting aspects of an always-connected world. But on balance, most would agree the computer has been of enormous benefit to America and the whole world. ■



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The personal computer has transformed nearly every aspect of American life, from business to entertainment to communications.

Suggested Reading

Hertzfeld, *Revolution in the Valley*.

Wozniak, *iWoz*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do the changes ushered in by the birth of the personal computer and related technologies like the Internet merit our using the phrase “digital revolution”?

2. On balance, have the changes in everyday life due to computer technology been beneficial or negative?

1975 The Digital Age—The Personal Computer

Lecture 46—Transcript

Welcome back. Today we look at the story of the personal computer, a piece of technology that has revolutionized American life in countless ways.

Let's start with a story. In late 1974, the January issue of *Popular Electronics* hit the newsstands. This magazine was hugely popular among computer enthusiasts, and this particular edition had an astonishing headline. It said, "Project Breakthrough! World's First Minicomputer Kit to Rival Commercial Models ..." It was the announcement of the arrival of something called the Altair 8800, the computer that jumpstarted the personal computer revolution. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, a young computer guy named Paul Allen picked up a copy of this magazine and he pretty quickly brought it to a friend of his, a Harvard undergraduate named Bill Gates. Gates soon quit Harvard and he moved with Allen to Albuquerque, New Mexico where the Altair was made; and there they established a software company they called "Micro-Soft" (they would eventually change the name). History was about to be made. At the same time, a group of computer enthusiasts in Northern California who were similarly thrilled by the arrival of the Altair 8800 soon began meeting regularly. They called their group the "Homebrew Club" and they met every now and again to discuss the building, the using, the improving, and the fixing of the Altair, as well as any other projects they were working on. Among this group were two upstarts named Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs. Before long, they brought along a computer of their own making to demonstrate to their friends. It was called the Apple I. History was about to be made.

Ok, now that we've set the stage, let's pause to set out some objectives for this lecture. In the course of this lecture on the birth of the personal computer, we'll focus on four things: First, we'll look at the origins of the first computers; the really big ones. Then, we'll examine the invention of a personal computer. From there, we'll explore the explosion in use of personal computers into American life. Finally, we'll examine the revolutionary impact of the personal computer, the Internet, and the dawning of what we now call the "Digital Age."

Let's start by looking at the origins of the first computers; and before we do that, let's ask a simple question: What exactly is a computer? In essence, it's exactly what the name suggests: It's a machine that computes or calculates. In fact, the word "computer" was invented or coined in the early 1600s as a term to describe an individual who performed mathematical calculations. A more technical definition of a computer is a machine that accepts data—you can input data into it—that will store that data, that will manipulate that data, and then will generate a useful output based on that data. By that definition, the abacus—a device that was invented at least as far back as 700 B.C. in Persia, maybe even earlier—is a computer; and so, too, were subsequent inventions like the slide rule, which was invented in 1622.

Over the next three centuries, inventors devised an increasing number of complex what they called "arithmetic machines"; and by "machines," I mean machines. These were huge devices that consisted of pulleys, gears, levers, cranks; it was all operated by hand. They manipulated these machines to generate answers to mathematical questions. By 1820, someone had invented the first four-function calculating machine; one that could add, subtract, multiply, and divide. Later in the 19th century, by the 1880s, inventors had increased the complexity of these machines; they'd begun to add punch cards and also keyboards for entering data. In the early 20th century, these machines were getting a little bit more complex as time went by; they began to add electricity to them and electric motors to help operate all that complex machinery.

But the real breakthrough period in the development of computers came during World War II. Why was this the case? Research into computer development was greatly accelerated in this period out of military necessity. The United States during World War II had battleships that could fire a 1,000-pound shell 25 miles; but, of course, at that kind of distance accuracy is a major issue given all the variables that went into that—distance, wind, temperature, and so forth—so the gunners on these ships needed what they called "firing tables"; lists of numbers that were produced by crunching massive amounts of data in complex mathematical formulas that would tell them precisely how to calibrate their artillery. Humans calculated all these numbers; most of them were women, in fact, during World War II. They could come up with these numbers but it took forever; they were basically

doing it by hand. They wanted some kind of device that would allow them to crunch more numbers more quickly.

Enter the Mark I, a computer developed by IBM and Harvard University. This computer began operation in 1944, and the Mark I could calculate at a speed five times faster than a human being. It was very soon handling computations for these firing tables; this massive amount of data that they needed to crunch down into easily-digested tables for these gunners. The Mark I was amazing; there was nothing quite like it. But it was also huge: It was five tons in weight; it was 8 feet high and 51 feet long; inside of it were at least 800 kilometers of wire; and it was cumbersome to operate. It was only partly electronic, so it required human beings to move switches—and there were 1,400 switches—and it also had a small motor to drive a long 50-foot drive shaft that ran the length of the computer. The British also developed a similar computer called “Colossus” at the very same time, and its calculating power was used to decipher the Nazi’s Enigma codes during World War II.

But these machines not “computers” as we understand them; they were essentially giant calculators used to crunch numbers. That changed with the arrival of the ENIAC, the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer. It was the world’s first true, all-purpose electronic computer. Work on this computer began in 1943 and was completed three years later in 1946, and it cost what at the time was a staggering sum of \$500,000. The ENIAC was a gigantic machine: It was 30 tons in weight; it was the size of an 18-wheel truck; it had 19,000 vacuum tubes and 6,000 switches; and it required an army of attendants, mostly women, who at the time were still called “computers.” If you went into a room in 1946 and said “Where’s the computer?” they’d say “She’s right over there”; we’re still not calling the thing “computer” yet. The ENIAC had to be programmed by hand, with attendants manually operating these switches and moving cables around. It was nonetheless the fastest computer in the world; it could add 5,000 numbers in a single second. The first problem that was ever inputted into the ENIAC took 20 seconds to complete. It had originally taken a man 40 hours to solve with a mechanical calculator; so we’re talking about a gigantic leap forward here in calculating speed. The ENIAC’s first major assignment was to calculate if it

was possible—to run the math essentially—to build a hydrogen bomb; and it turned out it was.

More developments followed. In 1947, Bell Labs invented the first transistor. This was a huge breakthrough because transistors required much less energy than tubes. Years later, in 1958, Texas Instruments developed the first integrated circuit. This was essentially a combination of transistors and resistors mounted on a single slice of silicon, what we now call a “chip”; and over the next decades, these chips would start to get smaller and smaller and, of course, have greater and greater capacity. In 1960, IBM invented the first transistor computer; we see these technologies coming together. It was called the IBM 7000. After that, many advances in computer technology continued to follow—this was a great leap forward every couple of years—and it led to basically a huge expansion of calculating power.

But these computers were expensive, they were massive, and they were centralized; they were like giant power plants, only a few of them sprinkled throughout the country. Since these giant computing power plants were only accessible to big business government—because they were the only ones that could afford them; they were worth millions of dollars—or the government, primarily the defense side of the government; or a handful of university labs; these computing centers were exclusive, so computing power and knowledge was confined to a very small elite. IBM dominated the field in terms of making these products; and, in fact, there were about eight companies in the country that made computers at the time, the eight leading companies, and they were called “IBM and the seven dwarfs.” IBM’s specialty in this time period was making mainframe computers; huge room-sized computers in a university lab, for example, and then small computer terminals sprinkled throughout the building, but all kind of feeding into the same computer brain.

But in the 1970s, things began to change rapidly. In 1971, a small company called Intel invented the first microprocessor. A microprocessor is essentially a tiny, tiny computer that is attached to an integrated circuit. This original one was called the Intel 4004 and it had, by our standards today, a tiny, tiny, little bit of power. But there’s one actually still operational on the Pioneer 10 spacecraft, which is the furthest man-made object from the Earth at this

point, but it's still working. This development of the microchip led directly to the development of the first "microcomputers" in 1973, and the best known of these was the Altair 8800; this is the one that we talked about in our introduction, the one that made the cover of *Popular Electronics* in January, 1974. It used this Intel microprocessor and it was sold as a kit; they didn't sell the computer, they sold the kit. If you wanted an Altair 8800 computer, you had to buy the kit; it would come by mail, and then you had to assemble it. It had only 256 bytes of memory—just a fraction what we expect today in our computers—and it was really just basically a prototype for what became the personal computer. In fact, no one who was dabbling in this really had any sense of what these personal computers would ultimately be good for; they knew they could do amazing things, but they weren't really sure what people would use them for. They weren't really at this point, in 1973 and 1974, imagining a personal computer revolution. And yet, that's just what's about to happen.

Ok, now let's turn to the invention of the personal computer. At this point, the mid-1970s, we have two kinds of computers: We have these massive mainframes for business, government, and research universities that cost millions of dollars and fill entire rooms. Then we have, at the other end of the spectrum, small, tiny computers; small in size, small in power. These were the "kit" computers like the Altair 8800, basically built by hobbyists. The personal computer revolution that's about to unfold will consist of creating a machine that will combine the power of these massive computers with the size of these little kit computers, and then add to that three other elements; three things: ease of use; affordability; and eventually, with the Internet, connectivity. That, in a nutshell, is the story of the personal computer. It's a story with many dimensions, many contributors, many breakthrough moments, and it's hard to pinpoint exactly when it began. But it began at some point: 1974–1975. Let's look at it as a revolution that unfolded in three successive phases; that's the easiest way to kind of break this down. These phases take place between 1975 and 1984. Phase one was the hobbyist/enthusiast phase; phase two, I call it the mass production phase; and then phase three, the user-friendly phase.

Let's start with phase one of the personal computer revolution, the hobbyist/enthusiast phase. As we noted in our introduction, this began in Northern

California in the 1970s with the development of a vibrant hobbyist/enthusiast community. These people were a bunch of, basically, really smart geeks who worked in the computer industry. They were computer engineers, electronics experts, mathematicians, and they all shared a passion for electronics and computers. They were the ones who were actually buying these kit computers like the Altair. And they were inveterate tinkerers, constantly making modifications and conducting experiments, and always asking, “What if I ...”

They eventually, in March of 1975 began to gather as an informal group called the Homebrew Club in someone’s garage in Menlo Park, California. There they discussed ideas, showed off their latest innovations, and they shared parts. It was a very informal collection.

Two of the most famous members of this organization were Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs. They were friends from high school, and both shared a mutual interest in computer technology. Wozniak worked for Hewlett Packard, Jobs worked for Atari. They’d recently begun collaborating on a small computer, what eventually what became the Apple I. It wasn’t a computer as we understand them. The Apple I was really just the brains of a computer—essentially an assembled circuit board. They actually screwed it to a piece of plywood. It had no keyboard and no monitor. Jobs and Wozniak, as part of this group, made many demonstrations before of this prototype. They showed off each new development and got some good feedback from their friends.

What’s remarkable about this period is that none of these people had any secrets. There’s no sense of proprietary information; none of them were harboring visions corporate greatness. Jobs and Wozniak thought with this Apple I that they were building that they would sell it. Wozniak even remembered saying, “We’ll make it for 20 bucks, and then we’ll sell it for 40 bucks.” But then, after they received a big order for this prototype from an electronics store, they decided to officially form a company, which they called Apple. They formed it on April 1, 1976.

Apple sold only one product, the Apple I, and it went on sale in July of 1976 for the price of \$666.66. It was a big success, at least relatively speaking. Quickly they sold 200 units. But Wozniak and Jobs were already at work

on the Apple II. That computer debuted in April of 1977, and it had an enormous impact on the computer industry and eventually on everyday life. It effectively started the personal computer revolution.

What made the Apple II stand out? The Apple II was the first personal computer that most people ever saw. It was easy to use, it was affordable, and it quickly became the first computer widely adopted in schools. The Apple II's popularity boosted other elements of the computer industry; so as it succeeded it made other companies succeed. It generated and helped generate a computer games industry and industries for educational software, word processors, and printers. It also sparked competition. The Commodore 64 was a rival company, and that product debuted in 1982. It was similar to the Apple II but it was less expensive and it sold 17 million units; that's the most ever for any single product. More companies joined because they were all realizing there's a lot of money to be made in this, and "personal" computers were becoming mainstream as a result. The key thing here in this phase is to see the decentralization of computer technology. That power plant model we mentioned earlier was now gone; computer power was being decentralized.

Now let's turn to the explosion in the use of personal computers; phase two of the personal computer revolution. This is what I call the "mass production phase." The success of the Apple II and other rival products prompted IBM to enter the game. This is a bit like the Ford Motor Company deciding to develop a small motorized scooter; they're the giant, right? In 1980, they assembled a crash team of 12 engineers and gave them one year to develop a personal computer. Here's where we see Bill Gates enter the picture and his company, Microsoft. While they were building this, IBM knew that they needed an operating system; something to run the machine. At this time, Gates was the developer of a successful series of specialized software products, and he was called in to meet with an IBM team. He met them in a hotel where he made his pitch, and he convinced them that he could deliver a system to operate their new personal computer. He left the hotel, as the story goes, and immediately went to a local software company—basically around the corner from Microsoft—that he knew had developed an operating system software package, and he bought the rights to that package, modified it, and then sold it back to IBM. But he held onto the right to license this product

to other companies, which would allow them to essentially clone the IBM machines in the years to come. This is seen in the annals of business history as a huge blunder by IBM; or, if you like the positive side of it, a brilliant move by Bill Gates. Microsoft went on to become one of world's largest companies and Gates one of the richest people in the world.

In 1981, IBM released its first personal computer, the IBM 5150. Let's listen to the press release that they issued to announce the arrival of this product: "IBM Corporation today announced its smallest, lowest-priced computer system—the IBM Personal Computer. Designed for business, school and home, the easy-to-use system sells for as little as \$1565." This product was a huge hit. They thought they might sell 250,000 units over five years; they ended up selling that many in just a few months, and they ultimately sold 3 million units in five years. The key point with this product is that there was nothing new or radical about it; it's the Model T of personal computers: It's simple, affordable, and reliable. In 1982, IBM's personal computer was named *Time Magazine's* "Man of the Year." By 1985, IBM held a 40 percent market share, which is huge; but this did not last for long, because IBM was soon surpassed by upstarts. IBM, when they built this PC, had opted for what they called "open architecture"; they basically used off-the-shelf parts. This allowed other companies like Compaq, Gateway, and Dell to make what they called "IBM compatible" computers, and they made them by the tens of millions.

Let's move on to phase three of this personal computer revolution, what I call the "user-friendly" phase; and again, Apple is at the center of our story. Back in 1979, they began working on taking the personal computer to the next level, and it was based on what at the time was a radical idea: They would build a computer that would fit the user, not a computer that would be amazing and have all kinds of functions and that the user would have to somehow figure out how to make it operate. They wanted a computer that everyone would want in their home; one that allowed people to perform useful functions and also to access information, eventually things like stocks, sports scores, and weather. As Steve Jobs later put it, it would be "a computer for the rest of us."

This was called the Macintosh, and Apple gave their revolutionary product a fitting debut: a Super Bowl ad during Super Bowl XVIII. This ad was considered one of the greatest ads of all time. It featured a sci-fi, 1984-ish scene where a mass of people are in an auditorium and they're watching a huge screen with a big face in the middle of the screen, a Big Brother-like figure haranguing them. Then, from behind them, comes a woman, running, and she's being chased by security guards; she's clearly some kind of a renegade. When she gets close enough to the screen she hurls a hammer into the screen and smashes it. Then the voiceover reads, "On January 24, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like 1984."

Clearly, Big Brother in this ad was Big Blue, which is the nickname for IBM. The Macintosh broke from the IBM format. IBM required users to type strings of commands; basically strange incantations like "copy a:\autoexec.bat." That really brings back memories for me, kind of painful memories. In contrast, a Mac introduced what was called a "graphical user interface" (GUI). This, in layman's terms, means a computer that uses a mouse that you can then click on icons; no more typed commands. Apple didn't invent the mouse or GUI, but they popularized it. The Mac, when it came out, was expensive—\$2495—but it sold really well: It sold 10 million units by 1993. More importantly than its commercial success, the Mac compelled everybody else making personal computers to make user-friendly personal computers. Computers quickly became easier to use, more powerful and more versatile, and less expensive; and these were the keys to unleashing the personal computer revolution. Just consider these statistics: In 1984, there fewer than a million computers in America; by 1989, 17 million; by 1997, 36 million. Worldwide, the computer sales started a little slower but then quickly caught up. In 1977, there were about 48,000 computers in the world; in 2001, 125 million; in 2007, 264 million. This means, if projections hold, in 2008 there were one billion computers in the world; and that number is expected to double by 2014.

The personal computer ushered in the "Digital Age." It was the leading edge of a wider and simultaneous spread of computer technology into everything: into cars, commercial airliners, televisions, telephones, electric guitars, microwave ovens, surgical instruments, wristwatches, factories, power

grids, the military, you name it; everything; and it was driven by smaller and more powerful silicon chips. Just think about this for a moment: Today's cell phone has more computing power than those room-sized mainframes of the 1960s.

Now I know I said there were three phases to the personal computer revolution, but let's add one more: connectivity. Here, we're talking about the Internet. The Internet was born in 1969. It was originally called ARPANET; The Advanced Research Projects Agency Network. It linked initially four major research universities so they could share information. That quickly expanded to 23 universities; and it's this system that eventually led to the development of email, so you could electronically communicate with people. In 1982, they started to call it the "Internet." A few years later, they began to add domain names; this is where we get .gov, .com, and .edu. But the Internet, like the early days of computers, was still at this point confined to just a small number of elites; basically people at research universities. The big breakthrough came in 1993 with the introduction of Mosaic, the first graphical web browser. That's what essentially allows people to click on icons and links when using the web; and this opened up the web to pretty much everyone. Now all the pieces were in place; and it's just like the Transportation Revolution: The microprocessor—if you want to think of about the way to compare these two—was like the steam engine; the personal computer was like the locomotive; and the Internet was like the railroad network, you can see having a similar kind of dramatic impact.

So what was this impact of the personal computer? There are many ways to look at it; let's just look at a couple. One was the economic impact: The introduction of personal computers created an entire new industry worth hundreds of billions of dollars. Just think of all the things that go into computers: software, hardware, programming, engineers, designers, retail outlets; it's a multi-, multi-billion dollar industry. It's also changed American business. Think about what's happened in the last 20 years since the 1990s: Entirely new retailers like Amazon, all online; there is no building, no bricks. And old retailers have now gone online; so you can buy products through a company that has been around for a hundred years, but now you can buy it online. Inventory management has changed: something called "just in time" management of inventory so that stores can manage how much stuff they

have based on the linkage between the cash register where stuff gets scanned and then their inventory, so these suppliers from far, far away know when they need another delivery of shoes, for example. Video conferencing has changed the way business operates; document sharing; I mean, the list goes on and on.

The personal computer revolution has changed communication; it's changed how we reach each other. It's now possible to stay in touch with people in unprecedented ways: There's email, there's instant messaging, there's text messaging; there are now things called social networking, things like Facebook and Twitter; it's just been extraordinary, the expansion of ways to communicate. One way to see this, to see how profound this has been, is to look at the email that has been generated by the White House. The Reagan administration was the first administration to use email, and by the time they were done they had generated 250,000 emails. President Bush—the first President Bush—had a four-year term and they generated 480,000 emails. President Clinton, with an eight-year term, 32 million; so from 480,000 to 32 million. Then we don't know, we're still counting, how many emails have generated in the previous Bush administration, but you can bet it's hundreds and hundreds of millions of emails. There's another telling statistic about how this is changing things: the decline in regular mail, what we sometimes call "snail mail." In 2006, the United States mail moved 213 billion pieces of mail. In 2010, they moved 170 billion; so the amount of old-fashioned mail is declining.

Information: How we get our information has been radically changed. There's been a massive expansion in the access that the average person has to information. Government agencies post their information now; educational institutions do; private companies do, companies that offer services in genealogy, for example, or medical advice; and archives. Just think about the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress is essentially America's giant archive, and they're now in the process of digitizing their entire collection; this is a part of a global digitization project. But it means that people from around the world and anywhere are going to be able to access what's in that amazing library; they don't have to go to Washington anymore. And let me tell you, this has really affected historians in a great way; how we do our

work. We now have access to millions of documents and troves of data all around the world just with a click of a mouse.

This revolution has changed the news media; it's transformed the way Americans access their news. Just think about newspapers. The physical newspaper may soon be a thing of the past; it's hard to believe. Hundreds of papers have closed since 2000, but online news is booming; and it's instant. You don't need to wait anymore until the next morning to figure out what's happened. The web has also spawned a vast number of websites devoted to news and news commentary and opinion. The days of news being dominated by a handful of newspapers and three television networks is long gone.

This has also changed politics; it's changed the dynamic of American politics. Politicians and candidates now depend on their websites to communicate with their political base and also to raise campaign funds. It's changed entertainment; it's changed the way we access and consume entertainment. When I was growing up in the 1970s, the "Wizard of Oz" appeared on TV once a year; and if you missed it, you had to wait another year. My children don't believe me when I tell them this. It's hard to believe this now, because now music, movies, and TV shows are available instantly on the computer or even in people's cell phones. It's just a click away.

We've only just gotten started in charting the impact of the personal computer revolution. There are so many other places we can see it: It's changed law enforcement, warfare, medicine, publishing, education; the list goes on and on. It's safe to say that the personal computer revolution has transformed modern life in America; and in many ways, these changes have been for the better. But with all revolutions in technology, there are some downsides. The downside to connectivity means you're always reachable. For many people, it's blurred the line between home and work; so people feel compelled these days to read work-related email at night and on weekends. They say it's a source of growing stress in their lives. The downside to networks that you can build through the Internet: People can get in touch with old friends and discover networks of people who share their interests, which is a great upside, but so, too, can terrorists, hate groups, and pedophiles. You can see there's a double-edged sword to this. There are also complaints about the virtualization of life; that if you go into a crowded area—a bus station, for

example, or the airport—everybody seems to be focusing on their handhelds, not on interacting with other people. There's also the fear that we maybe are too reliant on computer technology; that this makes us vulnerable. What would happen if an enemy country or a terrorist organization found a way to wage cyber war that paralyzed the U.S. economy or found some way to compromise our national defense? This sort of stuff is not really any longer just in the realm of science fiction. These are compelling questions, and they remind us that there always are tradeoffs with every revolution.

We'll have to leave it there in this discussion of the personal computer and the origins of the digital age. In our next lecture, we'll look at the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. Thank you.

1989 Collapse—The End of the Cold War

Lecture 47

The cold war dominated U.S. politics from 1945 to the early 1990s. It led to massive military expenditures and several major wars and proxy conflicts. At home, Americans lived in constant fear of nuclear annihilation and communist subversives in their own backyards. The collapse of the Soviet bloc, starting with East Germany in 1989, ended the cold war and left America in the welcome but unexpected position of being the world's only superpower.

The Berlin Wall was perhaps the greatest symbol of the cold war. It sealed democratic West Berlin off from the communist East Germany that surrounded it. Throughout its history, would-be defectors executed daring escapes past barriers of barbed wire, concrete, and armed guards; not all of them made it alive. U.S. presidents from John F. Kennedy to Ronald Reagan evoked it in speeches calling for democracy and freedom in Eastern Europe.

Two of the key figures in the fall of the Soviet Union were Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. Reagan was elected to the U.S. presidency on a platform of optimism about America's future and a tough stance against communism. He called the Soviet Union an evil empire, promoted a massive military buildup, and lent support to anticommunist forces in other nations, such as the Nicaraguan contras and the Afghani mujahideen.

When Gorbachev became the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, he faced an economy collapsing under the weight of poor production and enormous military spending. In 1987, he launched two reforms: glasnost, which loosened censorship and restrictions on speech; and perestroika, which aimed to restructure the workings of state.

By the time Gorbachev put these programs in motion, Reagan was becoming more open to improving relations with the Soviets, having come to doubt the ethics of the nuclear arms race. In 1987, Reagan and Gorbachev signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and agreed to reduce their

nuclear stockpiles. But it was too late for the Soviet Union. Perestroika failed to repair the Soviet economy, and glasnost unleashed wave after wave of critics and independence movements.

In 1989, democratic movements were breaking out all over the globe, from the Tiananmen Square protests in China to free elections and the victory of the Solidarity Party in Poland. Prodemocratic demonstrations in East

East Germans gathered by the wall, the guards laid down their weapons, and an enormous celebration ensued.

The next day, people took sledgehammers to the wall.

Germany drove First Secretary Erich Honecker from office. The East German government decided to allow strictly controlled passage through the Berlin Wall into West Germany.

Due to a bureaucratic mix-up, the media were told on November 9, 1989, that the borders were opening completely and immediately. East

Germans gathered by the wall, the guards laid down their weapons, and an enormous celebration ensued. The next day, people took sledgehammers to the wall. The communist regime collapsed, and within a year, the two Germanies were a single nation.

Shortly, the same forces of democracy and self-determination began to rock the Soviet Union. Gorbachev decided to open the Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union elections to non-Communist Party candidates. Hundreds of reformers and nationalists were elected, including Boris Yeltsin. The new congress debated and criticized the Soviet system on national television, uncensored. Then Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia declared independence.

Gorbachev devised the New Union Treaty to reorganize the remaining Soviet republics into a loose federation, but the day before it was to go into effect on August 20, 1991, Gorbachev was removed from office by Communist Party hard-liners. The nation erupted into massive protests, some led by Boris Yeltsin. Gorbachev was restored to power, but on December 8, 1991, the Belavezha Accords officially dissolved the Soviet Union.

The cold war was over, but who was the victor? Many argue that Reagan was the key figure; others point to Gorbachev, but in truth, countless men and women had struggled toward this goal for decades.

The end of cold war was greeted with enthusiasm in the United States. A few critics decried the expensive and dangerous way it had been fought, how America had stooped to compromising the ideals of free speech and the spread of democracy on more than one occasion in pursuit of communist containment. But most were ecstatic to find the United States was the world's only remaining superpower and predicted the dawn of a new and better world. ■

Suggested Reading

Engel, *The Fall of the Berlin Wall*.

Gaddis, *The Cold War*.

Meyer, *The Year that Changed the World*.

Questions to Consider

1. What caused the end of the cold war? Did the Soviet Union simply collapse from internal weaknesses, or was its demise brought about by decisions made by Americans like Reagan?
2. How should we characterize the cold war? Was it a noble cause that ultimately resulted in the defeat of a tyrannical power and an oppressive ideology? Or was it an expensive and unnecessary struggle that often caused the United States to compromise its core values?

1989 Collapse—The End of the Cold War

Lecture 47—Transcript

Welcome back. It's time once again to explore a key turning point in American history. Today, we look at the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War.

Let's start off like we always do with a story, this time one set in January, 1989. In a speech that month, Erich Honecker, head of the East German Communist Party, predicted that the Berlin Wall would stand for another 100 years. One month later, as if to confirm this claim, 20-year-old Chris Gueffroy was shot and killed trying to cross the Berlin Wall. This kind of incident was nothing new. Since the Berlin Wall had been erected in 1961, nearly 200 people had been shot trying to escape from communist East Berlin into noncommunist West Berlin. Chris Gueffroy was just simply the latest in a long line of Cold War casualties. It was the era of the Cold War. These things happened; and it seemed that they would probably happen forever. But by the end of that same year, on November 9, 1989, crowds of East Germans began to gather at the Wall and then breach the Wall. The next day they brought sledgehammers and they began to dismantle it piece by piece. In less than one year, East and West Germany were reunified and communism in the rest of Europe was on the way out. The Cold War was over and the United States was now the world's only superpower. Before it actually happened, no one would have predicted it. No one.

Before we go any further into this incredible story of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the end of the Cold War, let's set out some objectives for this lecture. Today we'll focus on five things: First, we'll look at the origins of the Berlin Wall. Then we'll examine exactly what happened in the 1980s that led to fall of the Wall. Then we'll explore the actual events of the Wall coming down. From there, we'll move on to look at the ripple effect that led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Finally, we'll examine the new reality of the post-Cold War era.

Ok, let's start with the origins of the Berlin Wall. The Berlin Wall was one of the great symbols of the Cold War. You'll remember from our lecture on the origins of the Cold War that tensions arose between the United States and the

Soviet Union almost immediately after World War II, especially over the fate of Germany. In the end, Germany was divided into two separate countries, a democratic West Germany and a communist East Germany. But to make things more complicated and more interesting, the same arrangement was used for the city of Berlin, which, if you look at a map, was located within communist East Germany. The existence of West Berlin as a pro-Western, democratic outpost rankled the communist government of East Germany and its patron, the Soviet Union. Especially vexing was the fact that thousands of East Germans used West Berlin as a conduit into freedom into West Germany. By 1960, about 2.5 million East Germans had escaped using this method. So on August 13 1961, East Germany sealed its borders with West Germany, including the border between East and West Berlin. This decision led to a panic in East Germany as thousands of people tried to get through to the west before the closure fully took hold. You may have seen some of the amazing newsreels and photographs from this moment; they show people literally jumping into West Berlin through windows of buildings that are situated right along the border. Eventually East German officials put up a wall, first of barbed wire and then eventually concrete barriers; and then finally a formidable Berlin Wall that made it look essentially like the wall of a maximum security prison with barbed wire, gun towers, searchlights, and German Shepherd dogs.

At a few official crossing points, people had to pass through rigorous checkpoints. People on the western side took to calling these guards “Checkpoint Charlie”; and if anybody tried to sneak across the border, East German guards had orders to shoot to kill. Among the first to die was 18-year-old Peter Fechter. On August 17, 1962, he was shot in the hip while trying to cross and the East German guards left him there to bleed to death. This incident generated international headlines, and, of course, international condemnation; and over the next three decades, 191 people would be shot trying to cross from the east to the west. The Berlin Wall as a result of this become a vivid symbol in the West of communism; of communism as a brutal system that denied basic human rights like individual liberty, freedom of movement, and democracy.

On June 26, 1963, while on a tour of Europe, President John F. Kennedy went to the Berlin Wall to deliver a famous address. No one remembers

much of what he said that day except for one sentence that expressed Western solidarity with people held under communist rule. Let's listen. "All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin. And therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words 'Ich bin ein Berliner.'" This was an extraordinary Cold War moment; and I must interject here to refute a common myth about Kennedy's choice of words. Many people have asserted that JFK botched the German. He did not; it meant precisely what he meant it to say: "I am a Berliner."

So it went in the 1960s, the 1970s, the 1980s; the wall seemed like it might be there forever. Then on June 12, 1987, President Ronald Reagan visited the Wall; and there he delivered a more direct challenge, not to the East German government but to its superpower patron and protector, the Soviet Union. Reagan aimed his most famous lines directly at the head of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. Let's listen to this one: "General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" It was a powerful statement; one of the iconic moments of the Cold War. But most people saw it as just that: iconic, or symbolic. Few people actually expected the Wall would come down in their lifetimes. But remember, and we've said this many times in the course of our lectures, history is the study of surprises. No one in 1861, for example, at the beginning of the Civil War, expected that slavery—an institution that was almost 250 years old at that point—was just about to come to an end. But it happened.

So now let's turn to the question of what happened in the 1980s that led to fall of the Wall. Two important things happened: One, Ronald Reagan was elected President in 1980; and number two, Mikhail Gorbachev became head of the Soviet Union five years later in 1985. These developments were important for different reasons. Let's start with Reagan first. Ronald Reagan, as most people know, began his career as a Hollywood actor; but by the 1960s, Reagan left acting for politics, and he very soon became a leading figure in the emerging conservative movement. He served two terms as governor of California, and then in 1980 he won the GOP nomination for President. The turmoil of the 1970s in many ways paved the way for Reagan's election; and we noted some of these depressing developments in

our lecture on Watergate: The 1970s brought Watergate, two oil embargos, high inflation, defeat in Vietnam, leisure suits—Ok, just kidding; wanted to make sure you were paying attention—and the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979. Cold War-wise, the Soviet invaded Afghanistan in 1979; and, more close to home, in Nicaragua, a pro-United States government was overthrown by communist revolutionaries, the Sandinistas. We seemed to be failing in our goal of containment. Many people asked by the end of the 1970s: Was America on the decline?

Here comes Ronald Reagan. Reagan arrived on the political scene with two messages: On the homefront, he preached good old-fashioned American optimism; he rejected the idea that America was in decline. He was fond of saying, “America’s best days lie ahead.” He also had harsh words for his opponents who took a more pessimistic view. Let’s take a listen:

[The Democrats] say that the United States has had its days in the sun, that our nation has passed its zenith. They expect you to tell your children that the American people no longer have the will to cope with their problems, that the future will be one of sacrifice and few opportunities. My fellow [Americans], I utterly reject that view.

That’s his domestic message. As for foreign policy, Reagan argued for toughness. He said that America needed to stand up to Soviet aggression. He said the communists used negotiations and treaties just as strategic tools, they didn’t really believe in them; and that they really only understood force, or at least the implied threat of force. Reagan called the Soviet Union an “Evil Empire” that abused human rights; and if elected, he said, he would dramatically increase defense spending and take a hard line toward the Soviets.

Ronald Reagan won the presidency handily in 1980. As promised, he immediately began a substantial military buildup, not merely of the Army and Navy, but also America’s nuclear arsenal and he also began funding of research into something called the “Strategic Defense Initiative,” or SDI. This involved creating a defensive shield, basically launching armed satellites into the atmosphere that could then shoot down nuclear missiles

while they were still in space; and that's why it's sometimes called by its nickname, "Star Wars," which is in reference to the popular movie back then. Reagan said these measures were necessary because the United States had to negotiate with the Soviet Union from a position of strength. He said in a speech in 1982, "Our military strength is a prerequisite to peace."

Ok, now let's move on to explore the rise of the second key figure in this story: Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev was born 1931 into a peasant farming family. He went to college and then he later joined the Communist Party. He went on to become a career Communist Party official and rose very rapidly through the ranks. In March, 1985, he was named General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; essentially, President of the Soviet Union. As General Secretary, Gorbachev was confronted by two huge problems: One was growing disunity within the Soviet Union. Fifty percent of the people within the Soviet Union were non-Russian; and the Soviet Union had never achieved one of its ultimate goals, which was what they called the "sovietization" of these peoples. Ethnicity and ethnic differences remained very strong; so the unity was in question. Second, there were tremendous economic problems in the Soviet Union. The Soviet economy never produced enough to meet the needs of its populace, and the government by the 1980s was facing rising deficits. Much of this was due to the burden essentially of incredible military spending. About 40 percent of the Soviet Union's budget was dedicated to the military. Put another way, the Soviet Union's military expenditures in the 1980s accounted for 15 percent of Gross National Product. What does that mean? Let's compare it and give it some perspective: If it's 15 percent of GNP in the 1980s, what's the United States spending? At the height of this big buildup by Reagan, they spent less than 6 percent of GNP; so it's 15 percent versus 6 percent.

For the Soviet Union, the situation was getting worse. The Soviet Union had launched in 1979 an invasion of Afghanistan that, by the mid-1980s, was a disaster militarily and incredibly expensive. Then second, the United States had launched its own big military buildup, so they had to spend more to keep up with us. Third, part of that military buildup was SDI, which was ultimately projected to be an incredibly expensive program. Gorbachev understood the problems; understood the threat posed by SDI. In March, 1986, he said to his inner circle, "They are putting pressure on us—to exhaust us." He was aware

of this kind of spending race that accompanied the arms race. Let's listen to what he also said a few months later to the Politburo, sort of warning them about what was happening: "[W]e will be pulled into an arms race that is beyond our capabilities, and we will lose it because we are at the limit of our capabilities. ... If the new round [of an arms race] begins, the pressures on our economy will be unbelievable." It's not so much about military, it's about economics that's going to determine matters here, or at least influence matters.

Gorbachev knew the Soviet Union had to change if it was going to survive; so in 1987, he launched two reforms: One was called "glasnost" and the other was "perestroika." "Glasnost" meant "openness" or "free speech," and then "perestroika" meant "restructuring"; perestroika was sort of aimed at restructuring the economy. The goal of here of these two reforms was not to bring Western-style democracy or capitalism to the Soviet Union; Gorbachev's goal was simple: to preserve the Soviet Union. Did it work? No, it did not. Let's examine why: Perestroika failed to change to Soviet economy; and this was really important, as we noted, because their economy's in trouble and they were committed to keeping up military with the United States, which is spending tons and tons of money on its military buildup, and it's also pursuing SDI. What about glasnost, or openness? Unfortunately for Gorbachev, it unleashed critics within the Soviet Union and it inspired independence movements within the 15 Soviet republics and then ultimately in Eastern Europe.

Now let's turn our attention to the actual events that led to the tearing down of the Berlin Wall. By 1989, democracy was in the air. In June of that year, responding to a growing pro-democracy movement, communist officials in Poland allowed I guess what we'd call a somewhat free election; and this led to the victory of a pro-democracy party called "Solidarity." At the same time, Hungary's communist government opened its borders with Austria; and immediately, thousands of people who wanted to escape life under communist rule began fleeing into Austria. Among them were hundreds, and eventually thousands, of East Germans who traveled to Hungary "on vacation" and then quickly skipped over the border into to Austria and then into West Germany. Soon Czechoslovakia opened its border, and this move also inspired a huge outflow of refugees. Eventually East Germany

responded by sealing its borders, and this move sparked huge demonstrations of crowds throughout East Germany. Many of the crowds chanted, “We want out! We want out!” By October of that year—October 18—the head of the East German government, Erich Honecker, was forced to resign. You may remember him; he was the person we cited in our introduction who predicted—this was just a few months earlier—that the Berlin Wall would stand for another 100 years. More demonstrations broke out.

On November 9, the East German government decided to allow limited passage out of East Germany; they were going to relax things a little bit, hopefully to defuse these demonstrations. But this movement would be strictly controlled and all travelers would be required to carry a special visa. But in one of the great flukes in modern history, the East German spokesman, a man named Gunter Schabowski, was in charge in sort of making this announcement. But he had been kept out of the loop in these discussions and he apparently didn’t read the memo all the way to the bottom of the page; so when he made the announcement before a large crowd of journalists, he was asked by journalists when would this freer movement commence. He answered off the cuff, “As far as I know effective immediately, without delay.” This was the wrong answer, but it had an immediate impact. Right away, West German TV announced, “[The] ninth of November is a historic day. ... East Germany has announced that, starting immediately, its borders are open to everyone.”

Huge crowds almost immediately began to gather on the East German side; and these guards, the “Checkpoint Charlie’s” we mentioned earlier, were not sure what to do; they didn’t have instructions. So they ultimately threw open the checkpoints, and this led to huge celebrations on the Berlin Wall. People climbed up on the wall—you’ve probably seen pictures of this—and they sang, they danced, and they set off fireworks. Very quickly, the international media showed up to capture all this on camera and to report. I have a very distinct memory of this. I was watching something on TV when it was interrupted by ABC News. Peter Jennings, the network’s anchorman, reported on what he called, “Astonishing news from East Germany” and then he went on to say that “perhaps the most important announcement made in Central Europe since the end of World War II.”

At the time, many people with long memories of previous would-be freedom moments during the Cold War—people thinking about Hungary in 1956, for example, or Czechoslovakia in 1968—feared what happened them would happen again: a military crackdown; that it was just right around the corner. But as it turned out, the next day, East Germans started arriving with sledgehammers and they began demolishing the Wall. Within days, they opened 10 more crossings. On December 22, the historic Brandenburg Gate opened up, and that’s the place where Presidents John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan made their famous speeches at the Wall. Three days later, on Christmas Day, 1989, the famous conductor—the American conductor—Leonard Bernstein conducted a concert in Berlin to celebrate the Wall’s collapse. The highlight was a rendition of Beethoven’s ninth symphony, which included the piece, “Ode to Joy.” Bernstein instructed the choir to substitute the word “freedom” for the word “joy”; so they actually sang on that occasion “Ode to Freedom.”

What happened next? With astonishing speed, the communist East Bloc disintegrated. The fall of the Berlin Wall inspired a wider revolution. East and West Germany were reunified as one country only 10 months later, in October, 1990. That fall, free elections led to non-communist governments in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia; and this was called the “Velvet Revolution.” The only place it wasn’t “velvet” was in Romania. The communist regime there refused to cede power and so was violently overthrown, and its leader, Nicholas Ceaușescu, was executed. By the end of 1990, democracy was sweeping across Eastern Europe; and no one saw it coming. Remember, this is a great example of history and surprises; people living in the moments don’t know what’s coming right around the corner.

But, of course, despite this amazing turn of events, the world’s most formidable communist country, the Soviet Union, appeared as strong and resolute as ever. What happened there that finally brought an end to the Cold War? The same forces of democracy and self-determination that arose in Eastern Europe soon began to rock the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union faced two big problems: One was rising dissent from within. You may remember we mentioned that the Soviet Union was made up of 15 republics, and within those republics 100 ethnic groups; so there’s a lot of turmoil from a unity standpoint. Second, there’s growing economic turmoil; the economy

was simply falling further and further behind. So what should Gorbachev do? To make a rather long and complicated story a little bit less long and complicated, Gorbachev decided to create something called the “Congress of People’s Deputies of the Soviet Union,” kind of a national congress; and he allowed more open elections to fill these seats. As a result, hundreds of reformers and nationalists were elected. Oops; not exactly what he had in mind, because these reformers and nationalists used the Congress as a forum to debate and criticize rather harshly the Soviet system; this was never done before, suppression of free speech was the norm. Now everybody was speaking very freely and they were speaking on national TV; and all of this was uncensored and it’s going into the homes of millions of people. This was the unintended consequence of glasnost. By early 1990, pro-independence movements were on the rise in these 15 Soviet republics; and then it finally started: On February 16, 1990, the Republic of Lithuania declared its independence. It was soon followed by Latvia and Estonia. The Soviet Union now faced a crisis.

To save the Soviet Union, Gorbachev came up with a new plan. This was called “The New Union Treaty,” and essentially it granted the 15 republics pretty much their independence but then bound them in a loose federation. Just before this new plan took effect in August, 1991, Communist Party hardliners staged an unsuccessful coup and this coup failed when they ordered the military to go in and crush protests and the military refused to do so; so the coup basically collapsed at that point. Gorbachev, who had been deposed during this coup, was put back in power; but the Soviet Union’s days were numbered. The spirit of independence that had taken hold, there was no making that go away. On December 8, 1991, the leaders of Russia, the Ukraine, and the Belarus republics met and signed an agreement that declared the Soviet Union dissolved. They replaced the old Soviet Union with something called the “Commonwealth of Independent States.” Gorbachev declared this an unconstitutional coup, he was totally against it, but there was no stopping it; and so on December 25, 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned and he declared the Soviet Union essentially null and void. The Soviet flag that day was lowered from above the Kremlin for the very last time. The Cold War was over; and most amazingly, it was over with a whimper and not a bang.

Who won the Cold War? A lot of people like to point to President Ronald Reagan, and he did play a key role; he probably arguably played the key role in the whole effort. But remember our theme that we've mentioned a number of times: multiple causation. History's rarely moved by a single factor or a single person. Let's think about some of the other people who played important roles: Mikhail Gorbachev played an important role. Even though he failed in his efforts to save the Soviet Union, he sort of unleashed the forces that ultimately pulled it apart. Lech Walesa: He was the former shipyard worker in Poland who formed Solidarity that led to the challenges to the communist regime in Poland, which ultimately turned sort of the early start of the process in the early 1980s. Pope John Paul II; he was another key factor. He was born in Poland and he provided powerful inspiration to the people of Poland and others in Eastern Europe during the 1980s; he kind of inspired them to challenge the system. President George H. W. Bush: It was on his watch that all this happened—he succeeded President Reagan in office—and many people credit him with deftly handling this amazing moment in international history. They say his smartest decision—some people say—was that he decided to stand back and not get involved; basically to stand back and let the Soviet Union self-destruct; that meddling might have made things worse.

Then, of course, we need to give credit to the many thousands of nameless, faceless people who played a role. Remember that other theme we've talked about, agency: nameless, faceless people that move history by their actions. Think of the courage of the people who over the course of 45 years spoke out against communist authoritarianism; who tried to get through the Berlin Wall; who participated in protests, protests that were often crushed militarily; and then, when given the chance, these same people would seize the opportunity when given a slight opening to vote out the old regimes. All of these took great amounts of courage; and there are millions of stories that we'll ultimately never know.

Finally, let's assess what the post-Cold War era meant: What did it mean that the Cold War was now over? The end of Cold War was greeted with enthusiasm in the United States; a kind of stunned enthusiasm. A lot of people had a hard time wrapping their minds around the notion that the governing reality of the last 45 years had now ended, now changed. But over time, as

the reality of the Cold War's passing became inescapable, many Americans drew some lessons from it. The end of the Cold War was a triumph, they argued, a triumph for American foreign policy. Remember the doctrine of containment; it appeared to them that this worked. Others said that the end of the Cold War was a triumph of American ideals; a triumph of freedom, democracy, individualism, and so forth. Others also argued that the end of the Cold War was a triumph of American capitalism; that all these things together would work to overthrow and to win the race, or win the struggle in the world, between capitalism and communism. In the end, much of the struggle came down to the weakness of the Soviet economy and the strength of the American economy, as we saw.

There were, of course, some critics who dismissed this celebration, this triumphalism, as self-serving and naïve. It was a good thing the Cold War was over, they agreed there, but they argued that we needed to be more critical in our assessment of what the Cold War actually meant. They pointed out the fact that the Cold War was phenomenally expensive; trillions of dollars were spent in building and maintaining a vast military with bases all around the world. What might the U.S. have done, they argued, with all that money if it had been spent on education or healthcare; or if had gone to programs aimed at development in the Third World? A second critical way to look at the Cold War was that it was dangerous. At the heart of the Cold War were two huge nuclear arsenals, both aimed at each other. Each side developed increasingly more powerful and lethal weapons of mass destruction, and there were several moments that nearly produced a nuclear war; the most famous was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. A third critical look at the Cold War said that in the course of fighting the Cold War, America compromised its ideals over and over again; they said that in the struggle for global influence, the United States was often willing to support ruthless, undemocratic dictators who abused the human rights of their own people simply because these dictators were pro-American and anti-communist. Some of the most famous (or infamous) regimes were the Shah of Iran, the Marcos regime in the Philippines, and the Somoza regime in Nicaragua. They also argued that the Cold War also caused Americans to compromise their ideals at home; it created a climate of fear—remember our discussions about McCarthyism in the 1950s—and it suppressed free speech and freedom of association.

Despite these thought-provoking criticisms, most Americans were ecstatic about the end of the Cold War. The United States was now the world's lone superpower; and democracy seemed to be on the march all around the world. Many argued that the post-Cold War age would see the dawning of a "new world order," and they thought of that in purely positive terms. The most famous expression of this sentiment came from a political scientist and philosopher named Francis Fukuyama who penned a famous essay entitled, "The End of History?" In this essay, he argued that the end of the Cold War marked the triumph of Western liberal democracy. Let's listen to a passage where he explains what he means:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.

This was a very optimistic prediction; but, as it turned out, one that was profoundly naïve. The United States enjoyed 10 years of post-Cold War peace and prosperity; but on September 11, 2001, America was hit hard not simply by a series of deadly terrorist attacks, but also by the new reality that these attacks represented: The dominant theme of the post-Cold War era, the dominant theme of the 21st century at least in the early part, would not be the "universalization of Western liberal democracy" as Fukuyama predicted, but rather the rise of stateless terrorism fueled by religious fundamentalism. That's the topic our next and final lecture. Thank you.

2001 The Age of Terror—The 9/11 Attacks

Lecture 48

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 led to a dramatic increase in national security measures that immediately raised questions about civil liberties and cost. Even more dramatically, two major wars were launched that, as of this writing, are far from over. The Iraq War proved intensely controversial both within the United States and internationally. The full fallout from the attacks cannot yet be measured, but they may yet affect every aspect of American life, from politics to communication to energy policy.

There are only a handful of events in American history where nearly everyone remembers exactly where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news. Most Americans would put the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, in this category.

On that sunny Tuesday morning, 19 terrorists—members of a group called al-Qaeda—hijacked 4 commercial airliners. They crashed two into the World Trade Center in New York City, one into the Pentagon in Washington DC, and the last in a field in Pennsylvania. Nearly 3,000 people were killed. It was by far the most devastating attack on U.S. soil in American history.

The key figure behind the attacks was Osama bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian who founded the al-Qaeda movement to restore strict Islamic law in Muslim countries through terrorist attacks on both Muslim and non-Muslim nations, particularly the United States. In 1998, bin Laden gave approval for Khalid Sheikh Mohammed to plan a major attack on American soil.

U.S. military, intelligence, and national security officials were aware of bin Laden and the broad outline of his plans—crashing hijacked airliners into buildings—but had no specifics on when, where, or how it would happen. In hindsight, we can see a pattern of growing commitment on the part of Muslim extremists to strike at U.S. targets going back to the 1980s. But anyone in the intelligence community will tell you there's a big difference

between warning signs and hard intelligence. Unfortunately, by 2001 communications had broken down between the CIA, FBI, and NSA as well.

The attacks left the nation in a state of shock, grief, and fear. But it also brought out people's humanitarian instincts. Thousands of people volunteered in relief efforts. Millions donated what amounted to several billion dollars to organizations like the Red Cross.

On a gut level, we may feel it is too soon to discuss the horrific events of 9/11 as a historical turning point. But it is hard to dispute the America's historical trajectory changed on that day. The attacks led directly to a war

The attacks left the nation in a state of shock, grief, and fear. But it also brought out people's humanitarian instincts.

in Afghanistan and indirectly to another war in Iraq, at enormous financial and human costs. These wars have also become increasingly divisive issues in American politics.

The 9/11 attacks also plunged the United States into what we might call the age of terror. Unlike the cold war, the enemy in this age is stateless, made up of small, far-flung groups of individuals, not governments or nations.

This climate of fear has also sparked intense controversy over civil liberties. Intelligence agencies were granted much greater latitude for tapping phones and acquiring personal records. A massive increase in security screening at airports is still ongoing. Over time, many Americans began to criticize the Patriot Act and other security measures as violations of basic civil liberties such as freedom from unlawful search and seizure.

Also, 9/11 and the ensuing wars raised serious questions about America's commitment to human rights and international law. Terrorist suspects and enemy combatants held at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility were denied the rights accorded prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions.

The events and results of September 11 reflect the key historical themes that we've been referencing in our lectures. Obviously, the incident both arose

from and caused conflict both abroad and at home. It is a clear case of the agency of a few—those 19 terrorists and their leaders—creating dramatic changes, but also of how the passengers of Flight 93 were willing to sacrifice themselves to avert further deaths. The United States has faced many tough choices since 9/11. And finally, the attacks came as a terrible surprise.

I hope that you've learned not only a few new facts about American history but new ways of looking at history, along with some and new insights into what drives historical change. Above all, I hope you've deepened your appreciation for the value of history in helping us make good decisions about the world we live in now. ■

Suggested Reading

Dwyer and Flynn, *102 Minutes*.

Wright, *The Looming Tower*.

Questions to Consider

1. How has the United States been changed in terms of its economy, politics, and values by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001?
2. Can we compare the events of September 11, 2001, with other dramatic or tragic events in American history?

2001 The Age of Terror—The 9/11 Attacks

Lecture 48—Transcript

Welcome back. We've done it. We've arrived at our 48th and final lecture on turning points in American history. Today we look at a fairly recent event, one that most of you listening to me lived through and remember all too well: the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

There are only a handful of events in American history where nearly everyone remembers exactly where they were and what they were doing when they first learned what had happened. In the 20th century, two events stand out: December 7, 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; and November 22, 1963, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Both these events happened before I was born, but I know both as a historian and from just growing up listening to people like my parents talk about what it was like to receive the shocking news that these were intensely memorable events. People recall them with extraordinary detail, remembering precisely where they were standing, what they were wearing, and who they were talking to. They also retain vivid memories of the days that followed. For the 19th century, it's safe to say that two events, both of them connected to the Civil War, probably had a similar effect on people: April 12, 1861, the day the first shots of the Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter in South Carolina; and April 14, 1865, the day President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. Of course, in recent times, Americans would point to September 11, 2001, as an event worthy of this kind of category; and

I'm sure that if any of you taking this course were seven years old or older on September 11, 2001, you probably have very, very clear memories of that day and the days that followed. The memory for me is especially fresh, clear, and intense. Although I originally hail from Massachusetts, I spent 13 wonderful years living in New York City, starting with graduate school and then continuing on once I landed my first real job as a professor. While there, I loved New York City; I loved every inch of New York City. But, as fate would have it, just a few weeks before 9/11, my wife, four daughters, and I moved to Massachusetts because I'd landed a new job. We had spent the previous six years in New York City living in Brooklyn, where it seemed that every other guy that we knew was a firefighter or a policeman. So when

9/11 hit, it was especially hard for our family; we felt especially wounded. We had just moved away just a few weeks earlier, and we had lots of great friends still living there. As it turned out, all of our firefighter and policemen friends survived, although, of course, a lot of them were scarred for life mentally as well as physically by this extraordinary ordeal. But a friend of mine from college and also the son of a very good friend of mine in New York were among those killed when the north tower of the World Trade Center collapsed.

I actually keep a picture of the Twin Towers on my office wall with photos of these two victims tucked in the corners; and I literally look at it every single day. I also do a lot of work in New York City, and I'm always struck by how strange the skyline looks when I'm downtown or when I approach Manhattan by boat. I'm always expecting to see the Twin Towers; it's just this great big gaping hole in the skyline. To this day, whenever I leave my house in the morning to head for work and it's a perfect fall or spring morning—you know the kind of day where it's 65 degrees with a bright, bright, cloudless, clear blue sky—I immediately think of September 11; and it happens every single time because that's precisely what the weather was like on that day, September 11, just before the planes hit. I know I'm not alone in holding such keen memories of 9/11. Millions of Americans, especially people who lived in New York City and actually witnessed it firsthand, have been affected this way.

I think I've digressed enough here and told you a little bit—maybe a little bit too much—about my own experience. It's time now to explore as a historian what exactly happened on 9/11. But before we do, let's be clear about the objectives for this lecture. We'll focus on three primary things: First, we'll revisit the events of September 11 to explain just what happened that fateful day and how the United States responded. Next, we'll seek to answer the question: Why does 9/11 qualify as a turning point in American history? Finally, we'll examine the many ways that September 11 has reflected these key themes—the many key themes that we've talked about over the course of our 48 lectures—like agency, choices, and so forth.

Ok, let's get started by revisiting the essential events of September 11 to explain just what happened that fateful day and how the United States

responded. The shortest answer is that on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, 19 terrorists—members of a group called al Qaeda—hijacked four commercial airliners and they crashed them into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, killing nearly 3,000 people. It was by far the most devastating attack on U.S. soil in American history. As I said, that’s just the simple answer; the story itself is far, far more complex. So where to begin? Let’s start with the key figure behind the attacks, a person named Osama Bin Laden.

Bin Laden was born in Saudi Arabia in 1957 to a very prominent and very, very wealthy family. He attended college and seemed by all accounts headed for a quiet professional life in Saudi Arabia, living in privilege. But he became increasingly fanatical in his religious beliefs, especially the notion that all true Muslims had an obligation to destroy Israel and to drive Western powers like the United States completely from the Middle East. In 1979, he headed for Afghanistan and played a key role in organizing the resistance to the Soviet Union, which had just invaded that country in 1979. Ten years later, in 1989, when the Soviets left Afghanistan, Bin Laden and a group of followers formed an organization called al Qaeda, which means “the base.” It was dedicated to waging jihad, or holy war, against the West, and in particular the United States, and restoring strict Islamic law in Muslim countries. Through the 1990s, Bin Laden and Al Qaeda supported and carried out many acts of terrorism, mostly in the Middle East. But increasingly they set their sights in a much bigger goal: attacking the United States on U.S. soil. In 1998, Bin Laden gave his approval to a second key figure in this story, a man named Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, to begin planning the attack that ultimately transpired on September 11. Bin Laden provided the funds and he personally selected most of the 19 hijackers. Over the next two years or so, at sites all around the world—including within the United States—these men worked out the logistics and selected the targets; and some of them, of course, learned how to fly commercial airliners.

Let’s pause here to ask a very difficult question: Should the United States have seen 9/11 coming? The answer is that the United States military, intelligence, and national security officials were onto Bin Laden and his plans. They knew the very broad outline of the plan and, of course, lots of other plans. They knew that there was a plan that involved hijackers seizing

airliners and crashing them into buildings, but they had no specifics on when this might happen, how this might happen, or where it might happen. Just like with Pearl Harbor—this is why history can be so instructive—in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, later investigations showed that we actually did have a lot of information and maybe should have been able to connect the dots. The same thing after 9/11: Investigations into what we knew and when we knew it revealed a lot of information and a lot of what we can see now in retrospect were warning signs.

Some of these warning signs go way back into the early 1980s. We can now see very clearly a growing commitment on the part of Muslim extremists, especially al Qaeda, to strike at the United States and strike at U.S. targets going way back into that time period. Just consider these incidents that, as they happened, seemed sort of like sporadic acts of terrorism, but now we can see them as forming a larger pattern. In 1983, a suicide bomber blew up the Marines barracks in Beirut, Lebanon; that killed 241 American servicemen. That's way back in 1983. On February 26, 1993, the World Trade Center was bombed. In that incident, only six people were killed, but it clearly indicated that this building and the United States itself was now a target. In 1996, the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia was bombed and that incident killed 19 members of the United States Air Force. In August, 1998, two U.S. embassies were bombed in Tanzania and also in Kenya, killing hundreds of people. On New Year's Eve 2000—or just before New Year's Eve 2000, the millennium—at least one suspected terrorist was seized and it was clear he was about to carry out acts of terrorism within the United States; so that was a foiled attempt. October 12, 2000, a suicide attack against the *U.S.S. Cole* in Yemen killed 17 U.S. sailors. But anyone in the intelligence services will tell you there's a huge difference between warning signals and hard intelligence about a specific plan; and this is especially true—as later investigations revealed—when we find out that the key intelligence agencies like the CIA, the FBI, and the NSA were not sharing vital information; so we had tons of information but not everybody had access to it, and it's also very hard sometimes to see what all this adds up to. People will debate this question of whether the United States government knew enough to stop the attacks for a very, very long time to come.

So with this unanswered and pretty big question still hanging in the air, let's turn to the events of September 11, 2001. Let's just look at the essentials; here's what happened: Shortly after 7:30 a.m., five hijackers boarded American Airlines Flight 11, bound for Los Angeles, leaving Boston. This flight and the other three hijacked that morning were carefully selected because they were nonstop flights to the West coast, which meant they were filled to the brim with jet fuel. At 7:59, American Airlines Flight 11 took off. Fifteen minutes later, at 8:14, two things happened: First, American Airlines Flight 11 failed to respond to an air traffic controller's order that it should climb to 35,000 feet. Two, United Airlines Flight 175, also leaving Boston, also bound for Los Angeles, took off with a full tank of fuel and five hijackers aboard. At 8:19, a flight attendant aboard American Airlines Flight 11 used a phone to call American Airlines to say that the jet has been hijacked by men with knives, mace, and claims of a bomb. One minute later, at 8:20, American Airlines Flight 77, bound for Los Angeles, took off from Washington Dulles International Airport. At 8:24, American Airlines Flight 11 made a sudden turn to the south towards New York City. Ten minutes later, at 8:34, air traffic controllers at Boston's Logan Airport alerted NORAD of the likelihood of a hijacking on a commercial airliner; and at that moment, two F-15 pilots immediately began to suit up and prepare for takeoff. At 8:42, eight minutes later, United Airlines 93 bound for San Francisco took off from Newark International Airport in New Jersey; and significantly, this plane had been scheduled to take off 40 minutes earlier and was delayed because of congestion on the ground. At 8:44, two minutes later, a flight attendant on American Airlines Flight 11 called to report the hijacking and the fact that the plane was flying at an extremely low altitude along the edge of a large city. Her last words were, "Oh my God, we are way too low." Then there's the sound of a crash, and then just static.

At 8:46, American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the north face of the North Tower of the World Trade Center at 490 miles per hour. It struck between the 93rd and the 99th floors and penetrated all the way to the building's core. The impact destroyed three of the four stairwells leading down to safety. Within seconds, the jet fuel on these full tanks ignited and the building began to burn. Within minutes, the media began issuing the first tentative reports of the incident; and then, of course, first responders began to arrive en masse. At about 8:50, four minutes after the first plane hit, both American

Airlines Flight 77 and United Airlines Flight 175 are hijacked. At 8:54, American Airlines Flight 77 suddenly veered back towards Washington, D.C. One minute later, at 8:55, President George Bush, who was meeting with children at a Florida elementary school, was notified by his staff that a small plane—sounding like a small private plane—had hit one of the towers, and that they would keep him posted. Three minutes later, at 8:58, United Airlines Flight 175 made a sudden turn for New York City. Four minutes later, 9:02 a.m., United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the south face of the South Tower at the World Trade Center. The plane hit between the 77th and 85th floors, causing damage very similar to that caused by the first plane and starting a similar fire. At 9:05, three minutes later, President Bush was interrupted as he read to a group of children in this elementary school, and he's interrupted by Chief of Staff Andrew Card who said, "A second plane has hit the second tower. America is under attack." President Bush continued with the reading and then was eventually taken to a makeshift command post within the school.

Eighteen minutes later, at 9:23, United Airlines Flight 93 was warned "Beware of cockpit intrusion." Five minutes later, the hijackers aboard United Airlines Flight 93 stormed the cockpit and took over the plane. Five minutes later, 9:33, Secret Service men at the White House were warned that a hijacked airliner was heading in their direction and not responding to radio contact. At 9:37, just four minutes later, American Airlines Flight 77 smashed into the Pentagon. At 9:43, the White House was evacuated. Two minutes later, U.S. airspace was officially shut down completely. At 9:57, the passengers about United Airlines Flight 93, informed by cell phone from friends and family that the earlier hijacked planes had been crashed into buildings, began to storm the cockpit of their airplane. One minute later, at 9:58—and 56 minutes after the initial impact—the South Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed. Five minutes later, at 10:03, United Airlines Flight 93 crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, brought down by the passengers' attack on the hijackers in the cockpit. Twenty-five minutes later, 10:28 a.m.—and 102 minutes after impact—the North Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed.

Wow, even a decade later, just reciting these bare bones facts is incredibly intense and chilling. Keep in mind that this whole timeline of events covered

just three hours; that's just the first three hours of that day. In the end, the total death toll was finally set at 2,977. This included 246 passengers and crew aboard the hijacked planes, 125 personnel at the Pentagon, 2,606 people at the World Trade Center, and of that number 343 firemen and 60 policemen. The attacks on 9/11 left the nation in a state of shock, a state of grief, and a state of fear; but it also brought out people's humanitarian instincts. Thousands of people headed for Ground Zero in New York to volunteer in the relief effort. Millions donated what turned out to be several billion dollars to organizations like the Red Cross.

Now it's time to pose the question: Why does 9/11 qualify as a turning point in American history? In some ways, I feel a certain reluctance in trying to assess the historical significance of this horrific event. There are loud voices in my head from my graduate school advisors; I can hear them now saying, "It's too soon" or "Look at how early pronouncements about historical events almost always turn out to be wrong or misguided"; so I'm a little bit cautious. But on the other hand, all my historical instincts tell me that 9/11 is without a doubt a major turning point in American history. So what I'll offer here is a careful, even guarded, assessment of 9/11 as a turning point; basically, I'll explain why I think it's a turning point but not exactly in precisely what way it is.

Let's remember how we've defined a historical turning point in this course. We've defined it as a moment when a society's historical trajectory is sent in a significantly new direction. A turning point marks the beginning of a new historical reality. In other words, turning points mark decisive "before and after" moments in history; and I think it's pretty clear that September 11 marks just such a point in American history. America became a very different place after September 11. How so? Let's look at several key things: First, we can say 9/11 is a turning point because it led directly to one war in Afghanistan and indirectly to another war in Iraq. Now at the time of this lecture in early 2011, both wars are still ongoing; so it would not be wise for me to try to make any bold statements about either war and how they're going to turn out. But these wars are significant, if only for their death tolls: Nearly 6,000 American servicemen and women have died in these wars as of 2011, and tens of thousands have been wounded. These wars are also significant because of their costs. Some people estimate they may both top

out at \$3 trillion dollars when all is said and done. These wars, like most wars in American history, have also become increasingly divisive issues in American politics.

Second, 9/11 immediately plunged the United States into what we might call the “Age of Terror.” This new reality of fear and uncertainty, of suddenly realizing that there were enemies bent on destroying us and that they might very well be living in our midst, had striking parallels with the Cold War. Both these struggles were struggles against frightening “-isms”: communism in the Cold war; terrorism after 9/11. Of course, there’s one big difference here: The communist threat as we perceived it after 1945 was centered in the Soviet Union and in other specific nation states like Korea, China, Cuba, and Nicaragua, just to name a few. Terrorism of the sort that we saw 9/11, however, is “stateless”; that is, it’s war being waged by small cells of fanatics spread throughout the world. Invading Afghanistan after 9/11 successfully deposed a government that had harbored al Qaeda, but it certainly didn’t destroy that organization or the many like it.

Third, this climate of fear has, just as it did during the Cold War and in other frightening moments in American history, sparked intense controversy over civil liberties. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, Congress passed the USA Patriot Act that, among other things, granted U.S. intelligence agencies much greater latitude when it came to tapping phones and acquiring the personal records like bank accounts and phone logs of individuals and American citizens. At the time, polls showed that many Americans were far more concerned about terrorism than the loss of privacy or civil liberties. This also explains why so few people objected to the massive increase in security screening at airports. But over time, especially after revelations that the government had conducted thousands of wiretaps without official legal approval and allegations that persons of Middle Eastern background were being subjected to perhaps “ethnic profiling” at airports and other places, many Americans began to criticize the Patriot Act and other measures like it as violations of basic civil liberties protections, such as freedom from unlawful search and seizure.

Fourth, 9/11 has raised serious questions about America’s commitment to human rights and international law. Shortly after the United States launched

its invasion of Afghanistan to depose the Taliban government there—and that’s the government that had harbored Osama Bin Laden and al Qaeda—U.S. officials established a detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to hold any enemy combatants and suspected terrorists that were apprehended by U.S. forces. Eventually hundreds of detainees from Afghanistan and later Iraq were brought there. When the Bush administration announced that these men were not entitled to the normal protections and rights accorded prisoners of war under the Geneva Convention and that they would be held indefinitely, many people within the United States and internationally charged that the U.S. was in violation of basic human rights and international law. Others, of course, defended the decision, saying that this was a new era, a new reality; a new reality of stateless terrorism and that maybe these old rules didn’t apply.

These four broad areas strongly indicate that September 11, 2001 was indeed a major turning point in American history. But the fact is, as with all major historical events, we simply don’t know precisely what the ultimate significance of 9/11 is. History tells us over and over again that it takes time, often a long time, before the deeper meaning of historical events becomes clear. I guess that’s sort of another way of saying “Time will tell,” and I’m sure it will.

Finally, in the time that we have remaining, let’s look at the many ways that September 11 reflected the key historical themes that we’ve been referencing in these many lectures in this course. Let’s start with the theme of conflict: One of our major themes has been the notion that history is the study of conflict; and as I’ve so often pointed out, it’s not just conflict in the form of war and violence—although there’s often a lot of that in history—but it’s often, especially in a democracy like the United States, we often have conflict over ideas and conflict over values. That’s what we argue about today in contemporary society. Remember some of the examples that we’ve encountered; remember the great debate over slavery. The great conflict of ideas and values in the mid-19th century was: Was slavery compatible with republican values? Another good example about whether women deserved the right to vote or should have the right to vote; people asked the question: Would giving women the right to vote destroy the American family and ultimately destroy the republic? When we talked about the Spanish American War it touched off a great debate: Could the United States engage

in imperialism and still uphold human rights? September 11 has generated its share of these conflicts; Americans have engaged in intense, often bitter debates. For example: Does the Patriot Act violate civil liberties? Does the holding of detainees indefinitely at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba violate the U.S. commitment to international law? Big questions that we're still struggling with.

Another of our themes is agency. We've emphasized agency over and over and over again—the fact that history is often made by prominent, eminent people like Thomas Jefferson or Andrew Carnegie—but agency forces us to focus on the fact that history's also made by the many nameless, faceless people that often don't end up in the history books. Whether they are slaves, or factory workers, or farmers, these people move history by taking agency; that is, they take matters into their own hands to achieve historical change. We saw this repeatedly in our many, many lectures; how a group of people, for example, dedicated to saving the wilderness—just a small handful of people—managed to start the national parks movement. Or how a group of dedicated women, against formidable odds, gained the right to vote in 1920. Or, a few years later, how groups of civil rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s succeeded in achieving landmark legislation that ended decades of racial oppression. The events of September 11 provided us with one vivid example of agency: the passengers in Flight 93. Once they learned that the hijackers planned to crash their plane into a building to kill hundreds, perhaps thousands, of innocent people, they stormed the cockpit and forced the plane to crash, even though they knew it meant their lives, in a remote field in Pennsylvania. Later investigations revealed that the hijackers almost certainly planned to crash that plane into either the White House or the U.S. Capitol. Think about what might have happened if they had succeeded. After all, the other three sets of hijackers had carried out their plans to perfection; so it's not that hard to imagine that final plan reaching its target.

Another theme: choices; we've emphasized choices up and down these lectures. History is the study of choices—I say this all the time to my own students—nothing is inevitable. At any given moment in history, change is driven by choices made by people; it's not driven by mysterious forces of inevitability. We think history's inevitable because things look inevitable after the fact; we look backwards and see that. But as things

are happening, they are not inevitable; it's the product of choices. When we think of history as inevitable, we do a disservice to it; because it takes away the drama of history and it also takes away the morality of history, because there's morality involved in many of these choices. We saw the role of choices at many junctures, and let's just cite a few that involve just U.S. presidents: President Abraham Lincoln's decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation; President Theodore Roosevelt's decision to support a sweeping set of reforms that formed the basis of the Progressive Era; or President Truman's decision to drop two atomic bombs on Japan at the end of World War II; or President Kennedy's decision, despite the huge political risks that it entailed, to call upon Congress to pass a new civil rights act; or President Lyndon Johnson's decision to escalate the war in Vietnam. You get the idea. Certainly September 11 has brought home this theme of choices. The U.S. has faced many tough choices since 9/11: the decision to go to war; the decision to greatly increase the power of the government to engage in wiretapping and other forms of surveillance; the decision to hold enemy combatants at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; even the decision, after much handwringing and soul searching, to rebuild office towers the site of the former Twin Towers. These all involve crucial decisions.

Finally, the theme of surprises. I've said it over and over again that history is the study of surprises; and by this I've meant that few people in any historical era are prepared for what's coming right around the corner. We've discussed many great examples of this point: The victory of the Americans at Saratoga in 1777; the invention of the telegraph in 1844; the discovery of gold in California in 1848; the assassination of William McKinley in 1901. In each case, no one had any idea that these events were coming, nor did they have any idea about what kind of dramatic and powerful changes that they would bring. This theme certainly applies to September 11, 2001. Could any American who woke up that day have guessed the shocking events that would transpire over the next few hours? And could they have expected how things would change American life in such profound ways? Probably not.

I'm afraid that's going to do it, not only for this lecture but for our course; and I want to thank you for participating in this course. It's been a lot of fun for me to prepare it, and I hope a lot of fun for you to experience. I really hope that you've learned not only a few new facts about American

history, but also that you've developed new ways of looking at history and new insights into what drives historical change. Above all, I hope you've deepened your appreciation for the value of history in helping us make good decisions about the world we live in now. I'll leave you with one of my favorite statements on this topic about the importance of knowing history. It's a line from the eminent historian Daniel Boorstin who once said, "Trying to plan for the future without knowing the past is like trying to plant cut flowers." Thank you very much.

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