

New World Beginnings, 33,000 B.C. - A.D. 1768

nation-state - The modern form of political society that combines centralized government with a high degree of ethnic and cultural unity. "No dense concentrations of population or complex nation-states...existed in North America...."

matrilineal - the form of society in which family line, power, and wealth are passed primarily through the female side. "...many North American native peoples, including the Iroquois, developed matrilineal cultures...."

confederacy - An alliance or league of nations or peoples looser than a federation. "The Iroquois Confederacy developed the political and organizational skills...."

primeval - Concerning the earliest origin of things. "...the whispering, primeval forests...."

saga - A lengthy story or poem recounting the great deeds and adventures of a people and their heroes. "...their discovery was forgotten, except in Scandinavian saga song."

middlemen - In trading systems, those dealers who operate between the original buyers and the retail merchants who sell to consumers. "Muslim middlemen exacted a heavy toll en route."

caravel - A small vessel with a high deck and three triangular sails. "...they developed

plantation - A large-scale agricultural enterprise growing commercial crop and usually employing coerced or slave labor. "They build up their own systematic traffic in slaves to work the sugar plantations...."

ecosystem - A naturally evolved network of relations among organisms in a stable environment. "Two ecosystems...commingled and clashed when Columbus waded ashore."

demographic - Concerning the general characteristic of a given population, including such factors as numbers, age, gender, birth and death rates, and so on. "... a demographic catastrophe without parallel in human history."

conquistador - A Spanish conqueror or adventurer in the Americas. "Spanish conquistadors (conquerors) fanned out across...American continents."

capitalism - An economic system characterized by private property, generally free trade, and open and accessible markets. "...the fuel that fed the growth of the economic system known as capitalism."

encomienda - The Spanish labor system in which persons were help to unpaid service under the permanent control of their masters, though not legally owned by them. "...the institution known as encomienda." Also a permit of sorts to conquer an area.

mestizo - A person of mixed Native American and European ancestry. "He intermarried with the surviving Indians, creating a distinctive culture of mestizo...."

province - A medium sized subunit of territory and governmental administration within a larger nation or empire. "The proclaimed the area to be the province of New Mexico...."

The Planting of English America, 1500-1733

nationalism - Fervent belief and loyalty given to the political unit of the nation-state. "Indeed England now had . . . a vibrant sense of nationalism . . ."

primogeniture - The legal principle that the oldest son inherits all family property or land. ". . . laws of primogeniture decreed that only eldest sons were eligible to inherit landed estates."

joint-stock companies - An economic arrangement by which a number of investors pool their capital for investment. "Joint-stock companies provided the financial means."

charter - A legal document granted by a government to some group or agency to implement a stated purpose, and spelling out the attending rights and obligations. "...the Virginia Company of London received a charter from King James I of England...."

census - An official count of population, often also describing other information about the population. "...an official census revealed that only about two thousand Indians remained in Virginia...."

feudal - Concerning the decentralized medieval social system of personal obligations between rulers and ruled. "Absentee proprietor Lord Baltimore hoped that...Maryland... would be the vanguard of a vast feudal domain."

indentured servant - A poor person obligated to a fixed term of labor. "...it depended for labor in its early years mainly on white indentured servants...."

toleration - Originally, religious freedom granted by an established church to a religious minority. "Maryland's new religious statute guaranteed toleration to all Christians."

squatter - A frontier farmer who illegally occupied land owned by others or not yet officially opened for settlement. "The newcomers, who frequently were 'squatters' without legal right to the soil..."

matriarch - A respected, usually elderly, female head of a household or extended clan. "A single long-house might shelter a woman's family...with the oldest woman being the honored matriarch."

melting pot - Popular term for an ethnically diverse population that is presumed to be "melting" towards some eventual commonality. "The hamlet of Savannah, like Charleston, was a melting-pot community."

Settling the Northern Colonies, 1619-1700

predestination - The Calvinist doctrine that God has foreordained some people to be saved and some to be damned. "Good works could not save those whom 'predestination' had marked for the infernal fires."

elect - In Calvinist doctrine, those who have been chosen by God for salvation. "But neither could the elect count on their predetermined salvation...."

conversion - A religious turn to God, thought by Calvinists to involve an intense, identifiable person experience. "They constantly sought, in themselves and others, signs of 'conversion.' ..."

visible saints - In Calvinism, those who publicly proclaimed their experience of conversion and were expect to lead godly lives. "all Puritans agreed that only 'visible saints' should be admitted to church membership."

calling - In Protestantism, the belief that saved individuals have a religious obligation to engage in worldly work. "Like John Winthrop, the [the Puritans] believed in the doctrine of a 'calling' to do God's work on this Earth."

heresy - Departure from correct or officially defined belief. "... she eventually boasted that she had come by her beliefs through a direct revelation from God. This was even higher heresy."

sedition - Concerning resistance to or rebellion against the government. "[His was] a seditious blow at the Puritan idea of government's very purpose."

commonwealth - An organized civil government or social order. "They were allowed, in effect, to become semiautonomous commonwealths."

autocratic - Absolute or dictatorial rule. "An autocratic spirit survived, and the aristocratic element gained strength...."

passive resistance - Nonviolent action or opposition to authority in accord with religious or moral beliefs. "As advocated of passive resistance, [the Quakers] would ... rebuild their meetinghouse on the site where their enemies had torn it down."

asylum- A place of refuge and security, especially for the persecuted or unfortunate. "Eager to establish an asylum for his people...."

proprietary - Concerning exclusive legal ownership, as of colonies granted to individuals by the monarch. "Penn's new proprietary regime was unusually liberal...."

naturalization - The granting of citizenship to foreigners or immigrants. "No restrictions were placed on immigration, and naturalization was made easy."

blue laws - Laws designed to restrict personal behavior in accord with a strict code of morality. "Even so, there were some 'blue laws' aimed at 'ungodly revelers.'...."

ethnic - Concerning diverse peoples or cultures, specifically those of non-Anglo-Saxon background. "...Pennsylvania attracted a rich mix of ethnic groups."

American Life in Seventeenth Century, 1607-1692

headright - The right to acquire a certain amount of land granted to the person who finances the passage of a laborer. "Masters-not servants themselves- thus reaped the benefits of landownership from the headright system."

disenfranchise - To take away the right to vote. "The Virginia Assembly in 1670 disenfranchised most of the landless knockabouts...."

civil war - A conflict between the citizens of inhabitants of the same country. "... this civil war in Virginia ground on...."

tidewater - The territory adjoining water affected by tides-this is, near the seacoast or coastal rivers. "Bacon... had pitted the hard scrabble backcountry frontiersmen against the haughty gentry of the tidewater plantations."

middle passage - That portion of a slave ship's journey in which slaves were carried from Africa to the Americas. "... the captives were herded aboard sweltering ships for the gruesome 'middle passage.' ..."

fertility - The ability to mate and produce abundant young. "The captive black population of the Chesapeake area soon began to grow not only through new imports bur also through its own fertility...."

menial - Fit for servants; humble or low. "... they performed the sweaty toil of clearing swamps, grubbing out for trees, and other menial tasks."

militia - An armed force of citizens called out only in emergencies. "[They] tried to march to Spanish Florida, only to be stopped by the local militia."

hierarchy - a social group arranged in ranks or classes. "... rough equality... was giving way to a hierarchy or wealth and status...."

corporation - A group or institution granted legal rights to carry on certain specified activities. "...the Massachusetts Puritans established Harvard College, today the oldest corporation in America...."

jeremiad - A sermon or prophecy warning of doom and calling for repentance. "Jeremiads continued to thunder from the pulpits...."

lynching - The illegal killing of an accused person by mob action without due process. "A hysterical 'witch-hunt' ensued, leading to the legal lynching in 1692 of twenty individuals...."

hinterland - Inland region back from a port, river, or the seacoast. "No broad, fertile hinterland... beckoned people inland."

social structure - The basic pattern of the distribution of status and wealth in a society. "... many settlers... tried to re-create on a modified scale the social structure they had known in the Old World."

blue blood - Of noble or upper-class descent. "... would-be American blue bloods resented the pretensions of the 'meaner sort.'..."

Colonial Society on the Eve of Revolution, 1700-1775

melting pot - The mingling of diverse ethnic groups in America, including the idea that these groups are or should be "melting" into a single culture or people. "Colonial America was a melting pot and has been from the outset."

sect - A small religious group that has broken away from some larger mainstream church. "They belonged to several different Protestant sects...."

agitators - Those who seek to excite or persuade the public on some issue. "Already experienced colonizers and agitators in Ireland, the Scots-Irish proved to be superb frontiersmen...."

stratification - The visible arrangement of society into a hierarchical pattern, with distinct social groups layered one on top of the other. "...colonial society...was beginning to show signs of stratification...."

social mobility - The capacity to pass readily from one social or economic condition to another. "...barriers to mobility...raised worries about the 'Europeanization' of America."

elite - The smaller group at the top of a society or institution, usually possessing wealth, power, or special privileges. "...these elites now feathered their nests more finely."

almshouse - A home for the poor, supported by charity or public funds. "Both Philadelphia and New York built almshouses in the 1730s...."

gentry - Landowners of substantial property, social standing, and leisure, but not titled nobility. "Wealth was concentrated in the hands of the largest slave-owners, widening the gap between the prosperous gentry and the 'poor whites'..."

tenant farmer - One who rents rather than owns land. "...the 'poor whites'...were increasingly forced to become tenant farmers."

penal code - The body of criminal laws specifying offenses and prescribing punishments. "But many convicts were the unfortunate victims...of a viciously unfair English penal code...."

veto - The executive power to prevent acts passed by the legislature from becoming law. "Thomas Jefferson...assailed such vetoes...."

apprentice - A person who works under a master to acquire instruction in a trade or profession. "Aspiring young doctors served for a while as apprentices to older practitioners...."

speculation - Buying land or anything else in the hope of profiting by an expected rise in price. "Commercial ventures and land speculation...were the surest avenues to speed wealth."

revival - In religion, a movement of renewed enthusiasm and commitment, often accompanied by special meetings or evangelical activity. "The stage was thus set for a rousing religious revival."

secular - Belonging to the worldly sphere rather than to the specifically sacred or churchly. "A more secular approach was evident late in the eighteenth century..."

The Duel for North America, 1608-1763

domestic - Concerning the internal affairs of a country. "It was convulsed...by foreign wars and domestic strife..."

minister - In politics, a person appointed by the head of the state to take charge of some department agency of government. "Leadership of a high order was provided by a series of brilliant ministers..."

magistrate - a civil official charged with upholding the law, often exercising both judicial and executive power. "...there was no trial by jury-merely the decision of the magistrate."

peasant - A farmer or agricultural laborer, sometime legally tied to the land. "Landowning French peasants...had little economic motive to move."

coureurs des bois - French-Canadian fur trappers; literally, "runners of the wood." "These colorful coureurs des bois...were also runners of risk..."

voyageurs - French-Canadian fur traders and adventurers. "Singing, paddle-swimming French voyageurs also recruited Indians..."

ecological - Concerning the relations between the biological organisms of their environment. "...they extinguished the beaver population..., inflicting incalculable ecological damage."

mutinous - Concerning revolt by subordinate soldiers or seamen against their commanding officers. "...he...was murdered by his mutinous men."

strategic - Concerning the placement and planned movement of large-scale military forces so as to gain advantage, usually prior to actual engagement with the enemy. "Commanding the mouth of the Mississippi River, this strategic semitropical outpost also tapped the fur trade..."

guerilla warfare - Unconventional combat waged by smaller military units using hit-and-run tactics. "...so a kind of primitive guerilla war prevailed."

buffer - "A territory between two hostile states, designed to soften an attack from one or the other side. "It was confined... to the much-buffed colony of Georgia..."

siege - A military operation surrounding and attacking a fortified place, often over a sustained period. "After a ten-hour siege he was forced to surrender..."

flotilla - A fleet of boats, usually smaller vessels. "The Indian fur flotilla...numbered four hundred canoes."

Regulars Trained professional soldiers, as distinct from militia or conscripts. "...they had fought bravely beside the crack British regulars..."

commissions - An official certification granting a commanding rank in the armed forces. "...the British refused to recognize any American militia commission..."

The Road to Revolution, 1763-1775

insurrection - Rebellion against political authority. "Insurrection of thought usually precedes insurrection of deed."

mercantilism - The economic theory that all parts of an economy should be coordinated for the good of the whole state; hence, that colonial economics should be subordinated for the benefit of an empire. "That theory was called mercantilism."

depreciate - To decrease in value, as in the decline of the purchasing power of money. "...dire need finally forced many of the colonies to issue paper money, which unfortunately depreciated."

protective tariffs - Taxes placed on imported goods, often to raise prices and thus protect domestic producers. "Manufacturers, workers, and farmers seek to ensure their prosperity through protective tariffs...."

mortgage - To pledge property to a creditor as security for a loan or debt. "Virginia planters ... were forced to buy their necessities in England by mortgaging future crops."

vice-admiralty courts - In British law, special administrative courts designed to handle maritime cases without a jury. "Both [acts] provided for trying offenders in the hated admiralty courts...."

virtual representation - The political theory that a class of persons is represented in a lawmaking body without direct vote. "Elaborating the theory of 'virtual representation,' Grenville claimed that every member of Parliament represented all British subjects, even...Americans...."

Non-importation agreement - Pledges to boycott, or decline to purchase, certain goods from abroad. "More effective than the congress was the widespread adoption of nonimportation agreements...."

mulatto - A person of mixed African and European ancestry. "...Crispus Attucks [was] described...as a powerfully built runaway 'mulatto'...."

duty - A customs tax on the export or import of goods. "...Parliament...repeal[ed] the Townshend revenue duties."

propaganda - A systematic program or particular materials designed to spread certain ideas; sometimes but not always the term implies the use of manipulative or deceptive means. "Their chief function was to spread propaganda...."

boycott - An organized refusal to deal with some person, organization, or product. "...this one called for a complete boycott of British goods...."

inflation - An increase in the supply of currency relative to the goods available, leading to a decline in the purchasing power of money. "Inflation of the currency inevitably skyrocketed prices."

desert - To leave official or military service without permission. "...hundreds of anxious husbands and fathers deserted."

America Secedes from the Empire, 1775-1783

mercenary - A professional soldier who serves in a foreign army for pay. "Why bring in outside mercenaries . . . ?"

indictment - A formal written accusation charging someone with a crime. "The overdrawn bill of indictment included imposing taxes without consent. . . ."

dictatorship - A form of government characterized by absolute state power and the unlimited authority of the ruler. "The [charges] included . . . establishing a military dictatorship. . . ."

neutral - A nation or person not taking sides in a war. "Many colonists were apathetic or neutral. . . ."

civilian - A citizen not in military service. "The opposing forces contended . . . for the allegiance . . . of the civilian population."

traitor - One who betrays a country by aiding an enemy. ". . . they regarded their opponents, not themselves, as traitors."

confiscate - To seize private property for public use, often as a penalty. "The estates of many of the fugitives were confiscated. . . ."

envoy - A messenger or agent sent by a government on official business. "Benjamin Franklin, recently sent to Paris as an envoy, jested [about] Howe. . . ."

rabble - A mass of disorderly and crude common people. "This rabble was nevertheless whipped into a professional army. . . ."

arsenal - A place for making or storing weapons and ammunition. "About 90 percent of all the gunpowder . . . came from French arsenals."

isolationist - Concerning the belief that a country should take little or no part in foreign affairs, especially through alliances or wars. "The American people, with ingrained isolationist tendencies, accepted the French entanglement with distaste."

hereditary - Passed down from generation to generation. "[The alliance] involved a hereditary foe. . . ."

blockade - The isolation of a place by hostile ships or troops. "Now the French had powerful fleets. . . in a position to jeopardize Britain's blockade. . . ."

privateer - A private vessel temporarily authorized to capture or plunder enemy ships in wartime. "More numerous and damaging than ships of the regular American navy were swift privateers."

graft - Taking advantage of one's official position to gain money or property by illegal means. "It had the unfortunate effect of . . . involving Americans . . . in speculation and graft."

The Confederation and the Constitution, 1776-1790

disestablish - To separate an official state church from its connection with the government.

Emancipation - setting free from servitude or slavery

Chattel - an article of personal or movable property; hence a term applied to slaves, since they were considered the personal property of their owners.

abolitionist - favoring the end of slavery

ratification - The confirmation or validation of an act (such as the constitution) by authoritative approval.

bill of rights - A list of fundamental freedoms assumed to be central to society.

aliens - Foreigners; also, persons resident in but not citizens of a country.

township - in America, a surveyed territory six miles square; the term also refers to a unit of social government, smaller than a county that is often based on these survey units.

Territory - In American, government an organized political entity not yet enjoying full equal terms of a state.

Annex - To make a smaller territory or political unit part of a larger one.

Requisition - a demand for something issued on the basis of public authority.

Foreclosure - depriving someone of the right to redeem mortgaged property because the legal payments on the loan have not been kept up.

Quorum - the minimum number of persons who must be present in a group before it can conduct valid business.

Anarchy - the theory that formal government is unnecessary and wrong in principle; the term is also used generally for lawlessness or anti-governmental disorder.

Bicameral, unicameral - referring to a legislative body with two houses (bicameral) or one (unicameral). "...representation in both houses of a bicameral congress should be based on population..."

Launching the New Ship of State, 1789-1800

census - An official count of population; in the United States, the federal census occurs every ten years. "...the first official census of 1790 recorded almost 4 million people."

public debt - The debt of a government or nation to individual creditors, also called the national debt. "...the public debt...was mountainous."

cabinet - The body of official advisers to the head of a government; in the United States, it consists of the heads of the major executive departments. "The Constitution does not mention a cabinet..."

circuit court - A court that hears cases in several designated locations rather than a single place. "The act organized...federal district and circuit courts..."

fiscal - Concerning public finances-expenditures and revenues. "His plan was to shape the fiscal policies of the administration..."

assumption - The appropriation or taking on of obligations not originally one's own. "The secretary made a convincing case for 'assumption.'"

excise - A tax on the manufacture, sale, or consumption of certain products. "Hamilton...secured from Congress an excise tax on a few domestic items, notably whiskey."

stock - The shares of capital ownership gained from investing in a corporate enterprise; the term also refers to the certificates representing such shares. "Stock was thrown open to public sale."

medium of exchange - Any item, paper or otherwise, used as money. "They regarded [whiskey] as a ...medium of exchange."

despotism - Arbitrary or tyrannical rule. "The American people, loving liberty and deploring despotism, were pleased."

impress - To force people or property into public service without choice. "They...impressed scores of seamen into service on English vessels..."

assimilation - The merging of diverse cultures or peoples into one. "The drastic new law violated the traditional American policy...speedy assimilation."

witch-hunt - An investigation carried on with much publicity, supposedly to uncover dangerous activity but actually intended to weaken the political opposition. "Anti-French hysteria played directly into the hands of witch-hunting conservatives."

compact - An agreement or covenant between states to perform some legal act. "Both Jefferson and Madison stressed the compact theory..."

nullification - In American politics, the assertion that a state may legally invalidate a federal act deemed inconsistent with its rights or sovereignty. "[The] resolutions concluded that...'nullification' was the 'rightful remedy.'"

The Triumphs and Travails of Jeffersonian Democracy, 1800-1812

patronage - "Denied the power to dispense patronage, the Democratic-Republicans could not build loyal political following."

writ - A formal legal document ordering or prohibiting some act. "...His Jeffersonian arrivals...would hardly enforce a writ to deliver commission to Marbury...."

tribunal - A court of justice of the place where it renders judgment. "...the black-robed tribunal of the Supreme Court had the last word on the question of constitutionality."

impeachment - "Jefferson urged the impeachment of an arrogant and tart-tongued Supreme Court justice...."

pacifist - Characterized by principle opposition to all war and belief in non interventionist, the pacifist...."

frigate - A fast, heavily armed warship, usually with two decks and high rigging. "The money could have been much more wisely invested in a few frigates of the Constitution class."

cede - To yield or grant something, often upon request or under pressure. (Anything ceded is a cession.) "Napoleon Bonaparte included the king of Spain to cede to France...the immense trans-Mississippi region...."

precedent - In law and government, a decision or action that establishes a sanctioned rule for determining similar cases in the future."...the transfer established a precedent that was to be followed repeatedly...."

sectionalist - Person devoted to the cause of a particular section of the country, as opposed to the nation as a whole. "Once-proud Federalists, now mere sectionalists, sank even lower in public esteem..."

conscription - Compulsory enrollment of men and women into the armed forces. "Impressments...were crude from conscription...."

broadside - The simultaneous firing of all guns on one side of a ship. "The British warship there upon fired three devastating broadsides...."

embargo - A government order prohibiting commerce in or out of a port. "...enacting the embargo was like cutting off one's toes to cure one's corns."

The Second War for Independence and the Upsurge of Nationalism, 1812-1824

hodgepodge - Composed of a mixed mass of diverse elements or groups. "His hodgepodge force consisted of seven thousand sailors, regulars, pirates, and Frenchmen. ..."

mediation - A friendly intervention, usually by consent, to settle differences between groups or nations. "Tsar Alexander I of Russia. ..proposed mediation. ..."

armistice - A temporary stopping of warfare by mutual agreement, usually in preparation for an actual peace negotiation between the parties. "The Treaty of Ghent ...was essentially an armistice."

nationalism - A strong devotion to the nation as the central political entity, often in a narrow or aggressive fashion. "Canadian patriotism and nationalism also received a powerful stimulus from the clash."

reaction (reactionary) - In politics, extreme conservatism, looking to restore the conditions of an earlier time. ". ..the Old World took the rutted road back to conservatism, illiberalism, and reaction."

protection (protective) - In economics, the policy of stimulating or preserving domestic producers by placing barriers against imported goods, often through high tariffs. "The infant industries bawled lustily for protection."

raw materials - Products in their natural, unmanufactured state. "Through these new arteries of transportation would flow foodstuffs and raw materials. ..."

internal improvements - The basic public works, such as roads and canals, that create the structure for economic development. "Congress voted. ..for internal improvements."

intrastate - Existing wholly within a state of the United States. "Jeffersonian Republicans. .. choked on the idea of direct federal support of intrastate internal improvements."

depression - In economics, a severe and often prolonged period of declining economic activity, rising unemployment, and falling wages and prices. "It brought deflation, depression, [and] bankruptcies. ..."

boom and bust - In economics, period of sudden, spectacular expansion of business activity or prices followed by significant losses. "The western boom was stimulated by additional developments."

wildcat bank - An uncontrolled, speculative bank that issues notes without sufficient capital to back them. "Finally, the West demanded cheap money, issued by its own 'wildcat' banks. ..."

peculiar institution - The institution of American black slavery. "If Congress could abolish the 'peculiar institution' in Missouri, might it not attempt to do likewise in the older states of the South?"

demagogic (demagogue) - Concerning a leader who stirs up the common people by appeals to emotion and prejudice, often for selfish or irrational ends. ". ..Marshall's decisions bolstered judicial barriers against democratic or demagogic attacks on property rights."

contract - In law, an agreement in which each of two or more parties agrees to perform some act in exchange for what the other party promises to do. "It was a contract-and the Constitution protected contracts against state encroachments."