

# Glossary

**Teal** words are defined in the margins of *History Alive! America's Past*.  
**Red** words (key terms) found inside definitions are defined in the Glossary.

## abolitionist

## Civil Rights movement

### A

**abolitionist:** A person who wanted to see slavery ended (abolished) everywhere.

**acts:** Laws created or passed by a **government**. For example, the Stamp Act was a law that was passed by the **British Parliament**.

**adapt:** To change ideas and ways of living to fit a new situation, such as a new **environment**.

**adaptations:** Changes in a way of life that allow people (or organisms) to survive in a particular **environment**.

**Age of Exploration:** A time in history when people from Europe traveled to faraway and unfamiliar places, such as Africa and the Americas, in order to learn about them and make maps of them. The Age of Exploration began in the late 1400s and continued through the 1500s.

**allies:** People or countries who help each other (for example, by fighting on the same side in a war).

**amendments:** Changes that have been approved and made part of the **Constitution**.

**Americas:** The continents of North and South America (connected by Central America), along with nearby islands, like those in the Caribbean Sea.

**annex:** To add new land to a country by taking control of it.

**archeologists:** Scientists who study human **artifacts** to learn about past cultures.

**Articles of Confederation:** The document that described a new national government for the former American colonies. (*Confederation* means "a joining together.") The Articles were approved by the states in 1781. They were replaced in 1789 by the **Constitution**.

**artifacts:** Objects made by groups of humans, such as tools and clothes. Artifacts help us understand the ways of life of the groups who made them.

**Assembly:** A group of **government** officials who meet to make laws.

### B

**bayonet:** A sharp blade, like a sword, attached to the end of a rifle.

**big game:** Large animals that are hunted for their flesh, skins, and other valuable body parts. (*Game* is another word for hunted animals.)

**Bill of Rights:** The first 10 changes, or **amendments**, to the **Constitution**. These amendments list basic rights and freedoms of Americans that the **government** cannot take away.

**boundary:** The geographic line between two places, such as two countries.

**branches:** Parts of **government** with different kinds of responsibilities and powers. In the United States government, the **legislative branch** makes laws, the **executive branch** carries them out, and the **judicial branch** interprets them.

**British:** Coming from, located in, or related to Great Britain (for example, the British government or the British army). The most important part of Great Britain is the country of England. For this reason, *British* and *English* are often used to mean the same thing.

### C

**cabinet:** A group of advisers to the president, including the heads of important departments in the executive branch.

**capital:** The town or city where government leaders do their work.

**capitol:** The main government building, where lawmakers meet.

**cash crop:** A crop that is grown in large quantities for sale to other people.

**cession:** The act of giving up ("ceding") **territory**, usually as the result of a **treaty**.

**checks and balances:** In the **Constitution**, ways of limiting the powers of the three parts (**branches**) of the **government**. The Constitution gives one branch the ability to "check," or stop, the action of another branch. It also divides, or balances, powers so that no one branch becomes too powerful.

**Chinese immigrants:** People from China who moved to the United States in the 1800s. (**Immigrants** are people who move to another country or part of the world and make their homes there.)

**Civil Rights movement:** The organized efforts by African Americans and other citizens to force individuals and states to honor their rights as Americans. The



Civil Rights movement began in the 1950s as a fight against segregation and other forms of unfair treatment in the **South**.

**Civil War:** The war that divided America in the 1860s. (A *civil war* is a war between citizens of the same country.) The war was fought between the states of the **North** and those of the **South** (or between the **Union** and the **Confederacy**).

**claim:** An area of land being worked by a miner. The miner had the right to valuable minerals found in the claim.

**Cold War:** The struggle between the "superpowers" (the United States and the Soviet Union) in the years following **World War II**. Although both sides piled up huge stores of weapons, they never fought each other directly, as countries do in "hot wars."

**colonial regions:** Areas in North America where different kinds of **colonies** developed because of differences in climate and natural features, or **geography**. The three colonial regions were the New England, Middle, and Southern regions.

**colonies:** Places ruled by another country, not by their own people.

**colonists:** People who settle in colonies.

**Common Sense:** A short, powerful book by Thomas Paine that argued plainly and simply that the American colonies should break away from Great Britain. *Common Sense* was printed in 1776 and helped to persuade many **colonists** to favor **independence** for the **colonies**.

**compass:** An instrument (tool) for finding directions. A magnetic compass has a needle that always points north.

**compromise:** A settlement of differences in which each side gives up some of its demands. For example, before the **Civil War**, the **North** and the **South** tried to settle their differences through compromises.

**Confederacy:** The new country that was formed by southern states in 1861. The Confederacy had its own **government**, laws, money, and army. It fought against the **Union** in the **Civil War**.

**Confederates:** Supporters of the **Confederacy**, especially soldiers in the Confederate armies.

**conquistadors:** Spanish **explorers** who came to the Americas in the 1500s and claimed large areas of land for Spain. *Conquistador* means "conqueror." The conquistadors often conquered native peoples (ruled over them in the name of Spain).

**Constitution:** The document that describes the government of the United States. The Constitution is the "supreme law of the land," which means that no other laws can contradict it.

**Constitutional Convention:** The meeting of delegates in Philadelphia in 1787 that made plans for a new and stronger government for the United States. The convention proposed the **Constitution** to replace the **Articles of Confederation**.

**contagious diseases:** Sickesses that can pass from one person to another as germs are spread by touch or through the air. For example, influenza ("the flu") is a contagious disease.

**Continental Army:** The army of volunteers led by General George Washington that fought the **British** in the **Revolutionary War**. The army was formed by the **Second Continental Congress**.

**craftsmen:** Highly skilled workers who usually specialize in one kind of work, or craft.

**cultural regions:** Areas of the world where people develop similar ways of life, or **cultures**. For example, Native Americans in North America lived in several cultural regions. The groups within each region had similar cultures.

**cultures:** Ways of living of different groups of people. A group's culture includes such things as its language, beliefs, tools, types of homes, and ways of working and playing.

## D

**debts:** Money that is owed to someone else. People (and organizations, such as **governments**) have debts when they have borrowed money and promised to pay it back.

**Declaration of Independence:** The document that announced that the American **colonies** were breaking away from Great Britain. The Declaration was approved by the **Second Continental Congress** on July 4, 1776. This date is considered the "birthday" of the United States.

**defenders:** People who protect or defend against outside attack.

**democratic:** Controlled or run by the people themselves, with each person having an equal say. In democratic **governments**, people usually elect representatives to make laws for them, and every person's vote counts equally. In some other kinds of governments, one person or a few people have the power to rule over everyone else without being elected.

**dilemmas:** Situations in which a person is forced to make a choice, even though there is no good choice to make. For example, millions of **enslaved Africans** had to choose between dying on the voyage to America or working for the rest of their lives as slaves.

**diverse:** Different from each other. For example, the



people who settled in the Middle **colonies** were very diverse.

**draft:** The selection of people to serve in an army whether they wish to serve or not.

**driftwood:** Wood that has washed up onto the shores of rivers or oceans.

## E

**East Indies:** Southeast Asia, including India, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

**economy:** The way that a particular region or country organizes the manufacture and exchange of such things as money, food, products, and services. An *economy* includes a system of money and all the businesses, industries, farms, and so on that help to produce, sell, or trade things of value.

**Emancipation Proclamation:** A special order by President Lincoln that freed (emancipated) slaves in states that were fighting against the **Union**. After the **Civil War**, slavery was ended everywhere in the United States.

**enslaved Africans:** People from Africa who were forced to give up their freedom and spend their lives obeying and working for their "owners," or masters. Enslaved Africans were treated as property that could be bought and sold.

**environments:** Places with different types of natural surroundings, including land, water, air, plants, and animals. For example, grasslands and deserts are two very different types of environments.

**executive branch:** The branch of **government** that carries out ("executes") laws.

**expedition:** A trip by a group of people involving some danger or risk, for example, to explore unknown places. The group itself is also called an *expedition*.

**explorers:** People who travel to new and unfamiliar places in order to learn what these places are like and describe them with words, pictures, and maps.

## F

**Forty-Niners:** Gold seekers from around the world who rushed to California beginning in 1849.

## G

**geographic terms:** Words that name different landforms and bodies of water. Examples of geographic terms include *bay*, *sea*, *peninsula*, and *island*.

**geography:** The study of our physical surroundings and how humans interact with them. Often, *geography* is

used to mean the physical surroundings themselves, such as "the geography of the United States." People who study geography are called *geographers*.

**Gettysburg:** A small town in Pennsylvania where one of the greatest battles of the **Civil War** was fought. The Battle of Gettysburg was a major turning point that helped the **Union** win the war.

**globe:** A sphere (ball) that shows a map of the Earth's features.

**goddesses:** Female spirits or gods who control parts of the world.

**gorge:** A narrow, deep valley with steep sides.

**government:** The people and groups who are in charge of a country or area (such as a town, a colony, or a state). The government makes rules and laws, and it has the power to see that they are obeyed.

**grant:** To give to someone something he or she has asked for. For example, the king granted William Penn the land called *Pennsylvania*.

**Great Depression:** A time of great hardship during the 1930s when millions of people lost their jobs and even their homes. (A *depression* is a long period when an **economy** suffers and businesses are forced to shrink or even to close.)

**guerilla tactics:** Tactics used by *guerillas* (fighters outside of a regular army), such as shooting at soldiers from hiding places in the woods.

## H

**home front:** In a war, the areas away from the fighting. A "front" is a place where fighting is taking place. On the "home front," people can help to win the war by ways other than fighting. For example, they can make supplies for their armies and send letters and gifts to encourage their soldiers.

## I

**immigrant:** A person who comes to live in a country from another nation.

**impeachment:** The act of accusing a **government** official of serious crimes, as defined by the **Constitution**.

**indentured servants:** Individuals who agreed to work for a period of time in exchange for free passage from Europe.

**independence:** Freedom, especially from control by another country or **government**.

**Industrial Revolution:** A time of great change in business, industry, and transportation that lasted from



about 1790 to about 1920. The Industrial Revolution changed the way people lived and worked by introducing hundreds of new inventions, machines, and ways of making products.

**Information Age:** A time of great change in the way people communicate and work with information. The Information Age began with the spread of television and computers in the second half of the **20th century**, and it continues to this day.

## J

**Jamestown:** The name of the second English **settlement**, or new community, in North America. Jamestown was started in 1607 in present-day Virginia.

**judicial branch:** The branch of **government** that interprets laws and settles disagreements about them. (*Judicial* is related to the word *judge*.)

**jury:** A group of citizens who decide the outcome of a trial.

## L

**landforms:** Masses of land, such as continents, islands, and peninsulas.

**latitude:** How far a place on Earth is from the equator, measured in degrees. Latitude is measured with the help of imaginary lines around the Earth called *parallels of latitude*.

**legislative branch:** The branch of **government** that makes laws. (Another word for "make laws" is *legislate*.)

**liberties:** The freedoms of citizens, such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion. In the United States, these freedoms are protected by the **Bill of Rights**.

**longitude:** How far a place on Earth is from an imaginary line called the *prime meridian*, measured in degrees. Longitude is measured with the help of imaginary lines called *meridians of longitude* that are drawn from the North Pole to the South Pole.

**Loyalists:** People in the American **colonies** who wanted the colonies to remain under the control of the king and Great Britain. Loyalists were loyal to the king and opposed **independence**.

## M

**Manifest Destiny:** "Obvious fate." In the 1800s, many Americans believed that it was natural and right for the United States to expand westward to the Pacific Ocean. This belief in the "obvious fate" of the United States was called *Manifest Destiny*.

**mesa:** A flat-topped hill area with steep sides.

**Mexicanos:** In the 1800s, Spanish-speaking people who lived in parts of the United States that previously belonged to Mexico.

**Middle Passage:** The voyage ("passage") of slave traders and **enslaved Africans** across the Atlantic Ocean from Africa to the Americas.

**migrants:** People who move (migrate) from one country or area of the world to a new home in another country or area.

**migration:** A movement of people from one country or area of the world to a new home in another country or area.

**migration routes:** The path followed by a group of people when they move from one country or area of the world to another.

**militia:** A small army made up of ordinary citizens.

**missionaries:** Representatives of a religion who try to get other people to adopt that religion.

**Mormons:** Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Mormon church was started by Joseph Smith in 1830. In the 1800s, Mormon **pio-neers** settled in the American West, especially Utah.

## N

**Neutralists:** American colonists who did not support either side (**Loyalist** or **Patriot**) in the fight for **independence** from Great Britain.

**New World:** The European name for lands in the Western Hemisphere, including North and South America. The Americas were a "new" world for Europeans, but not for the native peoples who already lived there.

**Nez Percé:** A group of Native Americans who lived in the northwestern part of the United States in the 1800s. French explorers called them *Nez Percé*, which means "pierced nose."

**nomadic:** Moving from place to place, often with changes in the seasons. For example, some Native American groups were nomadic, while others stayed in the same place year-round.

**North, the:** The northern region of the United States. In the 1800s, this region's **culture** and **economy** were very different from those of the **South**. In particular, most of the states in the North did not permit slavery. During the **Civil War**, "the North" meant the states that were loyal to the **Union**.

**Northwest Passage:** The supposed route across the northern part of North America that Europeans were looking for but never found. The explorers had hoped to find a northwest passage from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean so that they could get to Asia more quickly.



**nuclear weapons:** Weapons that release huge amounts of energy contained in the nuclei (centers) of atoms. Nuclear weapons also release deadly *radiation* (a form of energy).

## O

**ore:** Rock or earth from which metal can be taken.

**origin stories:** Tales that a group of people tell about where they came from and how the Earth came to be.

**overseer:** A person who was put in charge of the work of slaves. The overseer had great power over the slaves and could punish them for disobeying him.

## P

**Parliament:** The lawmaking part of the **British** government, similar to the Congress in the United States. The American colonists did not have the right to elect representatives to Parliament.

**Patriots:** People in the American colonies who wanted the colonies to break away from Great Britain. Such people favored **independence** for the colonies.

**physical features:** Important parts of the Earth's surface, such as mountains, rivers, plains, and oceans. Physical features of the United States include the Rocky Mountains, the Mississippi River, and the Great Plains.

**pioneers:** The first people from a particular group to move to a new place and begin living there. In the 1800s, the settlers who moved to the West were pioneers. But they were not the first people to make their homes in the West. Other groups of people already lived there, including Native Americans and **Mexicanos**.

**plantation:** A usually large area of privately owned land where crops were grown with the labor of workers or slaves who lived on the land.

**Plymouth:** A town started in 1620 by early English settlers, called *Pilgrims*. Plymouth was located in present-day Massachusetts.

**prejudiced:** Having a negative judgment or opinion without knowledge of the facts.

**professional:** To be well-trained and paid for one's work. For example, a professional army is made up of soldiers who are taught how to be skilled fighters and who are paid for their service.

**protest:** To complain publicly about something that people believe is wrong or unfair.

## R

**rancho:** An area of land granted to Spanish and Mexican

citizens in North America, usually for ranching (for example, raising cattle).

**ratified:** Approved; to have made a written document official by signing it.

**repeal:** To take back, or to cancel, a law.

**reservation:** An area of land set aside by the United States government for Native Americans to live on.

**Revolutionary War:** The war between the American colonies and Great Britain from 1775 until 1783. *Revolutionary* means "completely new and different." American revolutionaries wanted **independence** and a new and different **government**.

**rights of the accused:** The protections that the **Constitution** guarantees to citizens who are accused of crimes. Among these protections are the right to a lawyer and the right to a trial by jury.

**Roanoke:** The name of the island where the first English **settlement** (new community) was started in North America in 1587. Roanoke is located near the coast of present-day North Carolina.

## S

**secede:** A Southern state's action in rejecting the **government** of the United States and leaving the **Union**.

**Second Continental Congress:** The meeting of delegates from the American colonies that began in Philadelphia in 1775. The Congress approved the **Declaration of Independence** and acted as the colonies' **government** during the **Revolutionary War**.

**segregation:** The separation of people, especially by race. Segregation in the **South** was enforced partly by laws and partly by customs.

**settlements:** Small communities that are started in a new place.

**slave auction:** A sale in which slaves were sold to buyers who bid (offered prices) for them. Usually a slave was sold to the person making the highest bid.

**South,** the: The southern region of the United States. In the 1800s, this region's **culture** and **economy** were very different from those of the **North**. In particular, the states in the South allowed slavery. During the **Civil War**, "the South" meant the states that were part of the **Confederacy**.

**strategies:** Plans for winning a war, such as how and where to use an army or navy.

**surgeon:** A doctor who performs operations, such as cutting into the body to remove a bullet, or removing an infected leg.



## T

**tactics:** Specific ways of carrying out a plan, such as ways of fighting battles.

**taxation without representation:** Forcing people to pay taxes when they have had no say in making the law that created the tax. American colonists were angry about paying taxes that were passed by the **British Parliament**, where they had no representatives (people who could vote on the tax).

**territories:** Large regions of land. Within the United States, *territories* often refers to areas that have not yet been organized into states.

**tobacco:** A plant whose leaves are dried and turned into material for smoking or sniffing, or chewing.

**traitor:** A person guilty of acting against his or her own country.

**transcontinental:** Across the continent. The transcontinental railroad stretched across the continent of North America.

**treason:** The crime of disloyalty toward a ruler or **government**.

**treaty:** A formal agreement between two or more nations.

**20th century:** The 1900s, a time of great change in technology and ways of life. The 20th century was also a time of huge wars involving countries from all over the world.

## U

**unconstitutional:** In conflict with the **Constitution**. Laws that do not conflict with the Constitution are called *constitutional*.

**Union:** The United States as one country that is made up of the individual states. For example, a new state is said to join "the Union." In **Civil War** times, *the Union* referred to the **government** in Washington, D.C., and the states that remained loyal to it. In this meaning, *the Union* refers to the **North**.

## V

**veto:** To reject a bill and prevent it from becoming a law. Only the president has the power to veto bills.

**volunteers:** People who freely perform a service.

## W

**Williamsburg:** The capital town of the British colony of Virginia, where the colony's government met.

**World War I:** The first huge war in the **20th century** that involved countries from all over the world. World War I

was fought from 1914 to 1918 and involved more than 30 countries.

**World War II:** The second huge war in the **20th century** that involved countries from all over the world. World War II was fought from 1939 to 1945 and involved more than 50 countries.

## Y

**yoke:** A wooden frame that fastens around an animal's neck.