

A

abolitionist A person who wanted to end, or abolish, slavery.

acquisition Something that is gained, or acquired. The United States made a number of land acquisitions between 1783 and 1853 to reach the West Coast.

act A law created or passed by a government. For example, the Stamp Act was a law that was passed by the British Parliament.

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

adaptation A change or adjustment in a way of life that allows people to survive in a particular environment.

Age of Exploration The period of time, beginning in the late 1400s, in which European explorers sought new routes to Asia and discovered the Americas.

ally One person or nation united with another for a common purpose.

amendment A change to the Constitution.

the Americas The land masses of North America, Central America, and South America.

annex To add or incorporate (a new territory) into a country.

appeal To request that a case or a decision be reviewed by a higher court.

apprentice A person who learns an occupation by getting experience under a skilled worker.

archaeologist A scientist who studies artifacts to learn about past cultures.

artifact An object made by a group of humans, such as tools and clothes. Artifacts help us understand the ways of life of the people who made them.

Articles of Confederation The document that set up the first government of the United States. The government had limited powers.

assembly A body of lawmakers.

astrolabe An early scientific tool used to observe and calculate the position of the sun and other stars.

B

bill A draft of an idea for a law that is considered by lawmakers.

Bill of Rights The first 10 amendments to the Constitution that protect the rights and freedoms of American citizens.

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

boycott To protest by refusing to use or buy a good or service.

C

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

cede To give up territory, usually as the result of a treaty.

capitol The main government building, in which lawmakers meet.

cash crop A crop that is grown in large quantities for sale

checks and balances The system under which each branch of government limits, or checks, the powers of the other branches.

civil Non-criminal cases involving disputes among individuals about property, money, or other personal matters.

civil rights movement An organized effort, beginning in the 1950s, to achieve equal rights for black Americans.

Civil War The bitter conflict fought from 1861 to 1865 between the states that remained in the Union and the states that seceded and formed the Confederacy.

claim A piece of land worked by a miner seeking valuable minerals.

climate Aspects of weather, such as temperature, rainfall, and wind, that are measured over time in an area.

Cold War The struggle between democratic nations, led by the United States, and communist nations, led by the Soviet Union, that lasted from 1945 until 1991.

colonist A person who settles in a colony.

colony A community ruled by another country, not by its own people.

compass A tool or instrument for finding directions by first locating north.

compromise An agreement in which each side gives up some of what it wants.

Confederacy The nation formed by the 11 states (in order of secession—South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee) that left the Union.

conquistador a Spanish explorer who came to the Americas in the 1500s and claimed large areas of land for Spain. *Conquistador* means “conqueror” in Spanish. The conquistadors often conquered native peoples and ruled over them in the name of Spain.

constitution A document that describes how a government will work.

Constitutional Convention The meeting called by the states in 1787 to improve the Articles of Confederation that instead wrote a new constitution.

contagious disease A sickness that can pass quickly from one person to another as germs are spread by touch or through the air. For example, influenza (“the flu”) is a contagious disease.

craftsman A person who works at a job that requires manual or artistic skill.

cultural region An area of the world where people develop similar ways of life, or cultures. For example, American Indians in North America lived in several cultural regions. The groups within each region had similar cultures.

culture Way of living of a group of people. A group’s culture includes such things as its language, beliefs, tools, types of homes, and ways of working and playing.

D

Declaration of Independence The document that announced that the American colonies were breaking away from Great Britain and explained why.

delegate A person who represents others at a convention or conference.

democratic Relating to a form of government in which people have the power to rule themselves, often through elected representatives.

dilemma A situation in which a person is forced to make a decision even though he or she does not like any of the choices.

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

drought A long period with unusually low rainfall, which hurts growing and living conditions.

due process Proper legal procedures, such as a fair trial.

E

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

economy The way that a particular region or country uses resources to produce and sell or trade goods and services to meet people's needs and wants.

Emancipation Proclamation President Abraham Lincoln's order to free (emancipate) slaves in states that were still fighting the Union, and to allow African Americans into the Union army and navy.

enlist To agree to serve in an army or a navy.

environment The natural surroundings of a place, including land, water, air, plants, and animals. For example, grasslands and deserts are two types of environments.

equality The state of having the same rights and privileges as others.

executive branch The branch that carries out, or executes, laws.

expedition A group of people sent to explore unknown places.

explorer A person who travels in search of new geographical information. For example, the Europeans who sailed unknown seas in the 1500s looking for new routes to Asia were explorers.

F

First Continental Congress A meeting of delegates from 12 colonies, held to present complaints to King George III, to set up a boycott of British goods, and to arrange a second meeting if needed.

forty-niner A goldseeker in the California gold rush of 1849.

free state A state in which it was not legal to own slaves.

G

Gettysburg The site of an 1863 Civil War battle won by the North that was a turning point in the war.

geographic term A word that names a landform or body 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*.

globe A sphere that is a model of Earth and most accurately represents it.

gorge A narrow, deep valley with steep sides.

government The organization that makes the laws in a country, state, or community and has the power to enforce them.

grant To give something to someone of lower rank as a favor or privilege.

Great Depression The worst economic slump in history, which began in the United States in 1929, and spread to other parts of the world, lasting until 1941.

griot A western African storyteller who recites the history of a tribe or family.

H

home front Areas away from the fighting in a country at war.

I

immigrant A person who comes from his or her homeland to settle in another country.

impeach To accuse or charge a government official, such as the president, with a crime or misconduct.

import To bring into a country, especially for sale.

indentured servant A person who works for a period of time to pay off money owed for a debt, such as passage from Europe or other debts.

independence Separation from, or freedom from control by, another country or government.

industrialization The process by which new inventions create industries that use

factories to make products and that cause people to move from farms to cities for jobs.

industry A group of businesses that produce certain goods or services.

Information Age The period from the start of television (1941) to the present day, in which there is widespread electronic access to information through technology such as computers.

isthmus A narrow strip of land connecting two larger land areas.

J

Jamestown The first successful English colony in North America, it was founded in 1607 in present-day Virginia.

judicial branch The branch that interprets laws and settles disagreements about them; “judicial” comes from the word *judge*.

jury A group of citizens who are chosen to decide the outcome of a trial.

K

kiva A circular area, sometimes underground, where tribe members talk, work, or perform religious ceremonies.

L

landform a physical feature of Earth’s surface such as a mountain or a plain.

latitude An imaginary line called a parallel that circles Earth from west to east. Parallels of latitude measure in degrees how far north or south of the equator a place on Earth is located.

legislative branch The branch that makes laws: to legislate is to make laws.

longitude An imaginary line called a meridian that runs from the North Pole to the South Pole. A meridian of longitude measures in degrees how far east or west of the prime meridian a place on Earth is located.

Loyalist A person in the American colonies who opposed independence and wanted the colonies to remain under the control of the king and Great Britain.

M

manifest destiny An American belief in the 1800s that it was the natural right of the United States to expand westward to the Pacific Ocean.

marsh Wet, low-lying land that is poorly drained.

massacre The murder of several or many people who cannot defend themselves.

mercenary A soldier hired to fight for a foreign army.

Mexicano A person born in Mexico

mesa A flat-topped hill with steep sides.

Middle Passage The voyage of slave ships across the Atlantic Ocean, from West Africa to the West Indies and the American continents.

migrate To move from one region of the world to another region.

migration Movement of people from one country or area of the world to a new home in another country or area.

militia A body of mostly untrained part-

time soldiers who did required military service and were available for full-time paid duty when needed.

Minuteman A Patriot volunteer who was paid and trained to be ready to fight at a minute's notice.

missionary A representative sent by a religious organization to try to persuade other people to adopt that religion.

monarchy A form of government in which a ruler holds power for life.

Mormon A person who is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

N

nation-state An independent country whose people mostly share a common identity.

natural resource Something from nature that is useful to people, such as soil, water, and minerals.

New World The name that Europeans used to refer to the Americas.

neutral Not taking sides. In the American colonies, many people remained neutral and did not support either side (Loyalist or Patriot) in the fight for independence from Great Britain.

Nez Percé A member of an American Indian group that lived in areas of present-day states including northeastern Oregon, central Idaho, and southeastern Washington.

nomadic Moving from place to place, often with changes in the seasons, to follow sources of food. For example, some

American Indian groups were nomadic, while others stayed in the same place year-round.

North The region of the United States in the mid-1800s that included states in New England, in the Middle Atlantic section, and around the Great Lakes. This region had many cities, factories, and railroads. Most of its workers were free.

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 from Europe to Asia more quickly.

nuclear weapon A weapon that releases huge amounts of energy contained in the nuclei (centers) of atoms.

O

origin story A tale that a group of people tells about where they came from and how the Earth came to be.

overseer A person who was in charge of the work of 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.

Patriot A person in the American colonies who wanted the colonies to become independent from Great Britain.

physical feature A part of Earth's surface that is a landmass or a body of

water. Physical features of the United States include the Rocky Mountains, the Mississippi River, and the Great Plains.

pictograph A picture that represents an important event or idea.

pioneer One of the first people to settle in a territory.

plantation A large farm on which crops are grown by free workers or slaves who live on the land.

Plymouth A town started in 1620 by early English settlers called Pilgrims. Plymouth is located in present-day Massachusetts.

politics The activities of governments and the people who work in them.

prejudice Having a negative judgment or opinion of something or someone that is not based on facts.

proclamation An official public announcement.

protest To object in a public way to something that one believes is wrong or unfair.

R

rancho An area of land, usually for raising cattle, granted by Mexico to Spanish and Mexican citizens who lived in North America.

ratify To approve; to make a written document official by signing it.

Reconstruction The process by which Congress tried to rebuild the South and reunite it with the Union after the Civil War.

refugee Someone who flees from his or her home to another place or country to find safety.

repeal To cancel, or undo, a law.

republic A form of government in which citizens elect representatives who are responsible to the people.

reservation An area of land set aside by the United States government for American Indians to live on.

resolution A statement that expresses the wishes or decisions of a group.

revolution The overthrow of one government and its replacement with another.

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

royal colony A colony that is controlled directly by a king or queen, who usually appoints a royal governor.

rule of law A set of public laws that apply to all people equally, with no one getting special treatment.

S

secede To officially withdraw from a government or a country.

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 American Revolution.

segregation The separation of people, especially by race; in the years after the Civil War, until the 1960s, a practice enforced in the South by laws and customs.

settlement A small community that is started in a new place.

sharecropping A system of farming in which the worker is paid with a share of the crop he or she raises.

slave auction A public sale in which slaves were sold to the highest bidders.

slave state A state in which it was legal to own slaves.

slave trade The exchange of captured people for goods.

South The region of the United States in the mid-1800s that included states south of the Ohio River and latitude 36°30' north. This region had few factories or large cities. Most people lived on farms. African slaves worked on plantations.

spiritual A type of religious song that developed among enslaved Africans and that expressed deep emotion.

strategy An overall plan for winning a war, such as how and where to use an army or navy.

T

tactic A planned action, such as a way of moving or using troops, aimed at reaching a certain goal.

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 to present their views.

technology The use of scientific or mechanical knowledge to achieve a practical purpose, such as creating machines and weapons for use in war.

territory A large region of land.

trade A craft or an occupation that requires manual, artistic, or mechanical skill.

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

transcontinental Extending across a continent.

treason The crime of acting to overthrow your ruler or betray your country.

treaty A formal agreement between two or more nations.

triangular trade The exchange of slaves and goods among Europe, the Americas, and West Africa, using shipping routes across the Atlantic Ocean.

turning point An event that leads to a dramatic change.

tyrant A ruler who uses his or her power harshly.

U

Underground Railroad A system in which abolitionists secretly helped escaping slaves reach freedom.

Union The United States as one country; during the Civil War, the government and the armies of the states that chose to remain a part of the United States.

V

veto To reject a bill and prevent it from becoming a law, a power that belongs only to the president.

volunteer Person who performs a service for free.

W

West Indies Islands that lie between southeastern North America and northern South America, and separate the Caribbean Sea from the Atlantic Ocean.

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

World War I Also called the Great War, a conflict fought from 1914 to 1918 by troops from 32 countries.

World War II A conflict fought from 1939 to 1945 by troops from 61 countries; the most costly war in history in the number of people killed and the amount of property destroyed.

Y

yoke A wooden frame that fastens around an animal's neck and is then attached to a wagon or other vehicle.