

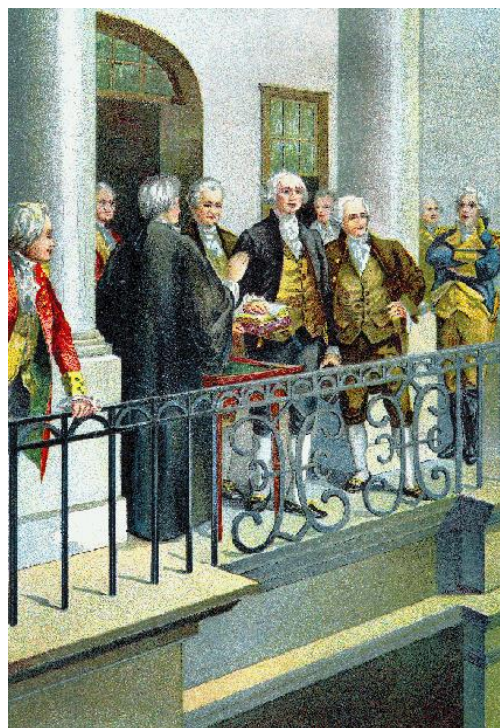
EARLY AMERICA OVERVIEW

The Foundation of Our Country—The discovery of a New World turned the Old World on its head. The discovery of America opened up new trade, new discoveries, and an escape route for those who disagreed with the ideas of the European monarchies. The history of the American continents is rich in diverse and fascinating stories of exploration, discovery, betrayal, and heroism. Our country's history began long before the Declaration of Independence or the Boston Tea Party, and this section illuminates the ways in which the formation of the United States was influenced by, and yet distinctly different from European governments and ideas.

Historical Divisions—The exploration of North America by **European Explorers** lasted from the early 1500's to the mid eighteenth century. Although the Spanish were the first to explore the region, most Spanish colonization occurred in Mexico and South America, where rich gold and silver mines were discovered. The French exploration and settlement occurred mainly along the St. Lawrence Seaway in the North, and at mouth of the Mississippi river where fur traders and fisherman set up a profitable trade with the local Indians. The first English settlements were along the East Coast, and they eventually developed into thirteen distinct colonies.

The **Colonial** period of America was influenced largely by the English settlers. They were the first to get a firm toehold in the East Coast, and establish relations with the native Indians there. The unhealthy political climate in England and the lure of religious freedom drove most of these early settlers. Some of the more well-known colonies from this time are Jamestown, where Pocahontas saved the life of John Smith, and Plymouth, where the Pilgrims first landed. To the west of the English, the French settlers were fewer in number, but many of them traded with the Indians, and even intermarried with them. By the time of the **French Indian Wars**, most of the Indians were friendly to the French and a major threat to the English.

The **American Revolution** was almost a direct result of the end of the French-Indian War. Once the French were defeated and the war was over, the colonists saw no reason for the British army to remain in the colonies and use up resources. Instead of withdrawing the troops and lightening the taxes, the British government imposed harsher measures to keep the unruly colonists in line. The situation escalated until the colonists banded together to form the



WASHINGTON TAKING OATH AS FIRST
PRESIDENT

Continental Congress and formally kick the British off American soil. By the end of the war, there was a formal Congress and a *Declaration of Independence*. A few years later came the *Constitution of the United States*, and the beginnings of a republic.

The **Early years of the Republic** were a critical period to the development of the United States. The early presidents struggled to keep the fledging country out of the great French Wars being fought throughout Europe, while the acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase from France opened up vast territory and resources. Eventually, the new country was drawn into the War of 1812 as a result of British outrages and the depredations of Barbary pirates force the new country to defend its rights at sea. Eventually the country enjoyed thirty years of peace before fighting a War with Mexico that greatly expanded the territory of the nation. Several important inventions came to light during the early years of the republic, including the cotton gin, the telegraph system, and the mechanical reaper.



THE FIRST THANKSGIVING.

Differences between the industrial northern and agricultural southern states arose during the first half of the 19th century, leading inevitably to a **Civil War**. Differences in policies regarding slavery, tariffs, states' rights, and foreign policy made it certain that there would be conflict eventually, and the attempts at fixing the problem with legislature only managed to delay the inevitable conflict. Abraham Lincoln had barely been sworn in as President when the opening shots of the war were fired. The four years of conflict that followed were some of the bloodiest in American history, and left scars that would last for a very long time.

The decades following the Civil War were peaceful and prosperous overall but involved a great deal of change and disruption, which is why they are called the **Progressive Era**. Many inventions, such as the telephone and the light bulb changed the speed at which people communicated, and the length of time they could work. There were many political changes as well, driven by men like James Garfield and Theodore Roosevelt. The only war fought during this time was the Spanish American War which resulted in American possession of the formerly Spanish colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.

The **Westward Expansion** did not begin in earnest until after the Mexican American War, when the United States annexed the American Southwest from Mexico.

The settlement of the western coast of the United States was accomplished through skill, bravery, and occasional bursts of sheer luck. Over a period of about 130 years, all of modern-day America had been opened for exploration, and Hawaii and Alaska were being tentatively discovered. The California Gold Rush played a major role in the settlement of the Western United States, as did the creation of the Transcontinental Railroad. Gold was also discovered in Alaska, which furthered the exploration of the North.