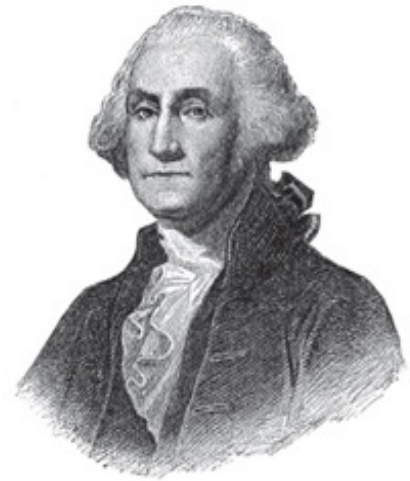




SOUTH CAROLINA WAS THE FIRST SOUTHERN STATE TO SECEDE FROM THE UNION AT THE ONSET OF THE CIVIL WAR.

THE WATERGATE SCANDAL LED TO A CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS.



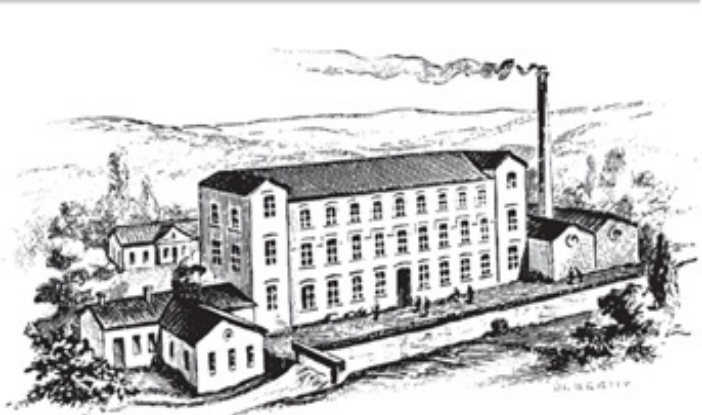
# U.S. HISTORY

HISTORIC EVENTS,  
KEY PEOPLE, IMPORTANT  
LOCATIONS, AND MORE!

# 101

A  
*CRASH COURSE*  
IN  
**AMERICAN  
HISTORY**

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY WAS MARKED BY INCREASED INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE RISE OF LARGE-SCALE FACTORIES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES, LEADING TO MASSIVE WEALTH.

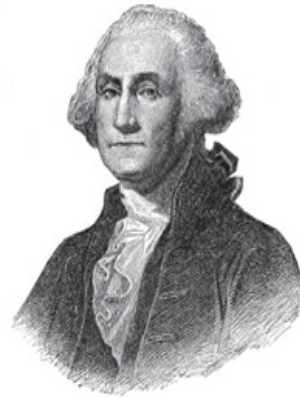


KATHLEEN SEARS



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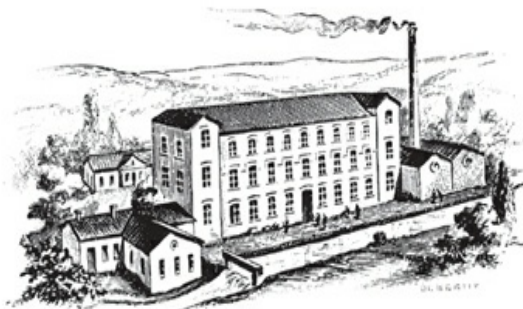
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IMPORTANT LOCATIONS, AND MORE!**

**KATHLEEN SEARS**

 **Adams**media  
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# INTRODUCTION

The United States is a great experiment.

When the Founding Fathers gathered in Philadelphia first in 1776 to hammer out the reasons for the colonies' separation from England and then in 1789 to agree on a form of government for the new nation they'd brought into being, they were fully aware of the unusual nature of what they were doing. True, there had been revolutions in history before. But no one before this had undertaken to so radically reform the nature of society, to create from scratch a country governed by its people, one in which "all men are created equal."

That vision has taken a long time to realize, and it's not yet complete. Perhaps it never will be. America's history has been punctuated by a long, bloody civil war, unrest and rebellion, physical expansion and political turmoil, and by economic growth and contraction. Today, as the most powerful nation on Earth, the United States continues its experiment in freedom.

This book was written to help you understand and appreciate that experiment. In its sixty-three entries, you'll find information about events ranging from the landing of Columbus to the Great Recession; from the Boston Massacre to the Boston Marathon bombing.

Sometimes, because we often take history for granted, it's possible to lose track of the power and meaning of the story of the United States. For all its flaws—and many of them will be pointed out in the pages that follow—America is a remarkable country. This

rapid journey through its history will let you glance at both the high and low points and see how they contribute to the totality.

*U.S. History 101* doesn't dwell in detail on any single topic; rather, it lets you skim through American history and see where the country's been—and possibly get an indication of where it might be going.

Take a moment to look at a dollar bill. On the back of the bill, on the left side, you'll see the Great Seal of the United States, adopted toward the end of the revolution. At the bottom of the seal appears a quote adapted from the poet Virgil: "*Novus Ordo Seclorum*." The phrase means, "a new order of the ages." That's how the founders of the United States saw their revolution—as a decisive break from the past. As the heirs of and participants in that new age, we need to understand and value its history.



# **CROSSING THE LAND BRIDGE**

## **The First People**

Long before the arrival of Christopher Columbus, the American continents had been home to a thriving indigenous population of perhaps 70 to 90 million people for more than 20,000 years. The first humans to inhabit North America probably arrived from Asia by land bridge or sea, long before European contact.

## **BERINGIA**

Some 35,000 years ago, when much of the northern oceans were massive glaciers and ocean levels were much lower, the Bering Strait land bridge connected northern Asia and what is now Alaska. Although we refer to it as a bridge, it was in reality a large body of land, called Beringia, that connected the two continents and was home for around 5,000 years to a number of human beings. At some point (evidence is sharply divided on when this occurred) these humans began moving east and south, gradually spreading across the North American continent.

Archaeologists and anthropologists generally agree that most of the people native to North America migrated from Siberia, likely pursuing animals such as the woolly mammoth. These people gradually spread to Central and South America. Ilya Zakharov, deputy director of Moscow's Vavilov Institute of General Genetics, has conducted DNA testing to determine the exact origin of North American Native Americans. In an expedition he led in 1997,

Zakharov went to the Ak-Dovurak region, 2,000 miles southeast of Moscow, and took hair samples from about 430 Tuvan people. An analysis of the DNA contained in the hair root was compared with Inuit and Amerindian, including Navajo and Apache, samples. High percentages of exact matches of the DNA between the Tuvan samples and those of Native Americans support the link between Siberia and North American peoples.

### **Multiple Origins?**

Even though anthropologists generally agree that the land bridge was a major source of the first inhabitants of North America, some evidence suggests that parts of the population may have come from elsewhere. For instance, the fossilized skulls of the Beringians look quite different from those of Mesoamericans from the south. It's possible that these people arrived by boat from some unknown location.

# LEIF ERICSON AND VINLAND

## The Vikings Make Landfall

Although there are a number of theories—some supported by archaeological evidence—concerning early voyages to the Americas, the most accepted one concerns the people known as the Vikings.

Evidence suggests that around the year 1000, the Norse explorer Leif Ericson, the second son of Eric the Red, who had landed in Greenland in 982, set foot on the North American shore, which he called Vinland (later called Newfoundland) for its profusion of what he referred to as wild grapes. Legend tells that he fitted out an expedition and sailed west, in an attempt to gather proof of the claims made by the Icelandic trader Bjarni Herjulfsson. In 986 Herjulfsson, driven far off course by a fierce storm between Iceland and Greenland, had reported sighting hilly, heavily forested land far to the west. Herjulfsson, though likely the first European to see the continent of North America, never set foot on its shores.

In 1960, archaeologists discovered the remains of an ancient settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows on the very northern tip of Newfoundland in Canada. Investigation established that this was a Norse settlement, which many have identified with Leif Ericson and Vinland (though Vinland seems to have referred to the whole land and not just the area in which the Norse settled).

The outpost at L'Anse aux Meadows lasted only a few years; although the Norse found plenty of fish and birds to sustain them, the absence of large game forced them to turn their interest elsewhere, and they abandoned the settlement.

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## **Adam of Bremen and Vinland**

The German medieval historian Adam of Bremen (second half of the eleventh century) reported that he had been informed of the Norse discovery of North America. In his chronicle, he writes: “[Svend Estridsen, the Danish ruler] also told me of another island discovered by many in that ocean. It is called Vinland because vines grow there on their own accord, producing the most excellent wine. Moreover, that unsown crops abound there, we have ascertained not from fabulous conjecture but from the reliable reports of the Danes.”

# COLUMBUS'S VOYAGES

## Europeans Discover America by Accident

In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, as every schoolchild knows, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. There have been a lot of myths about Columbus's voyage.

**Myth:** Columbus proved the world was round, not flat.

**Fact:** He did no such thing, since he didn't circumnavigate the globe. Nor did he need to; by the fifteenth century, pretty much all educated people knew the world was round.

**Myth:** Columbus discovered the New World.

**Fact:** As we've seen, the Vikings had already landed there—not to mention that there had been people living in the Americas for at least 20,000 years before Columbus arrived.

Christopher Columbus was born near Genoa, in Northern Italy, in 1451. Young Columbus began his seafaring career shortly after Portuguese navigators reached the Cape Verde Islands off the coast of West Africa in 1460.

## COLUMBUS HAD A HUNCH

Around 1483, Columbus went to King John II of Portugal for endorsement of his plan to discover a new route to Asia by sailing west. Asia was the place to get what everyone wanted back then—spices, essential for preserving food. But King John II rejected

Columbus's petition. By 1485 and now a widower, Columbus moved with his son to Spain. Persistent as ever, he presented a plan the following year to Isabella and Ferdinand, the queen and king of Spain. Again, Columbus was refused. However, in 1489 Queen Isabella listened to Columbus again. He left their meeting with hopes of organizing a future expedition, once Spain's war with the Moors was over.

## **READY, SET, SAIL**

In 1492 the Spanish sovereigns approved Columbus's expedition to find a western route to Asia on behalf of Spain. Preparations in the Spanish port of Palos began in May with the requisitioning of three ships, and by August the *Niña*, *Pinta*, and *Santa María* set sail. Columbus was commissioned with the promise that he would receive one-tenth of the profits from the expeditions, and he was granted several titles, including "Admiral of the Ocean Sea," viceroy, and governor of whatever lands he discovered.

### **First to Get the Reward**

Ferdinand and Isabella had promised that the first man to sight land would get a yearly pension of 10,000 *maravedis* (Spanish gold coin). A few hours after midnight on October 12, 1492, Juan Rodriguez Bermeo, a lookout on the *Pinta*, spotted what was most likely an island of the Bahamas, but Columbus claimed to have spied land first and collected the reward himself.

After taking on supplies in the Canary Islands and sailing over the vast sea, on October 12, 1492, crewmembers sighted land. The natives they encountered called the land Guanahani, which Columbus later dubbed San Salvador. Historians still argue about the precise landing spot, but it was somewhere in the Bahamas.

## **COLUMBUS MISCALCULATED**

Columbus believed he had found Asia, but actually he'd miscalculated the distance, and a few other minor details. In fact, to say he misjudged would be an understatement. Some believe he underestimated Earth's size by 25 percent. Many people, including Columbus, thought the oceans were far smaller than they really are and that the land masses were much larger. His crew wasn't pleased that their journey took as long as it did, and there were rumblings of mutiny.

Believing he'd landed in Asia, or the Indies, Columbus called the natives he encountered "Indians." Since he hadn't found the spices he was looking for, he kept sailing, encountering Cuba and Hispaniola (modern-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic). In a Christmas Day storm, the *Santa María* struck a coral reef, split open, and sank in the vicinity of today's Cap-Haïtien in Haiti.

## **THE FIRST COLONY**

Columbus didn't know what to do with the survivors of the *Santa María*. The *Pinta* wasn't nearby, and the *Nina*, the smallest of the fleet, could not make room for the *Santa María*'s crew. In the end, Columbus decided to leave behind thirty-nine of his men to

establish a colony he named La Navidad (Christmas), the first attempt at European settlement since the Vikings.

These European settlers discovered not only a new land, but new ways of living and eating as well. For instance, the Arawak (Bahamas) and Taíno (Caribbean) slept in hand-woven *hamacas*, or hammocks. Columbus's men discovered a new diet of corn (maize), sweet potatoes, and red chili pepper, and they learned to grow squash, pumpkins, and beans. Then there was the botanical novelty the inhabitants smoked—tobacco. In turn, the Arawak learned how to farm with cattle, pigs, and horses, which the Europeans later brought with them. However, the Native Americans had no resistance to European diseases, and many succumbed to smallpox, whooping cough, and measles. Diseases brought to the Caribbean by the Europeans contributed to the deaths of more than 3 million Native Americans between 1494 and 1508.

### **Return with Natives**

Columbus sailed home triumphantly, bringing several Native Americans as proof of his successful expedition. While in Lisbon, he wrote a soon-to-be-famous letter describing his Caribbean discoveries, and shortly thereafter appeared in Spain before Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand.

## **COLUMBUS RETURNS**

After an absence of six and a half years, the *Pinta* reappeared in Hispaniola. When Columbus had departed years before, he'd left La



Navidad unfortified, for he assumed the relations between his settlers and the Native Americans were amicable. Little did he suspect that the Spaniards would take to pillaging and plundering, and that the once-friendly Native Americans would retaliate. No doubt some colonists also succumbed to illness and perhaps were unaccustomed to the tropical climate. On his return voyage in 1493, Columbus found no survivors at the settlement.

Seventeen caravels (fast sailing ships) with nearly 1,200 men sailed as part of Columbus's second expedition. He set a more southerly course this time, aiming for unexplored islands he'd learned about, including Dominica, Guadeloupe, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica.

Unhappy that his first settlement site had been dictated by the shipwreck, Columbus chose to sail east to establish another new colony. But this time weather was a deterring factor. With trade winds so strong he could not safely continue sailing, he chose another site for his new settlement (still on Hispaniola), which he named La Isabela.

### **The *Ecomienda* System**

In the *ecomienda* system, the Spanish conquistadors were given trusteeship over the native people they conquered. The conquistador could tax his trustees and summon them for labor on the land and in return he was to provide law and order and teachings in Catholicism. The system however was quickly corrupted and became a tool for oppression, ultimately forcing the natives into slavery.

Even after all this time, Columbus still believed that Cuba was a part of the Asian mainland and that he wasn't far off his original course. However, he was discouraged to find none of the golden treasures that Marco Polo had described from his journeys in Asia.

## **POOR MANAGEMENT**

Rather than sending gold back to the Spanish court, Columbus captured natives, sending them home to be sold as slaves. The Crown also authorized the *encomienda* system, which, instead of being a grant of land, was a grant of a type of slave labor. The natives revolted, skirmishes ensued at the colony, and Queen Isabella objected to the slaves, sending a royal commission to investigate the situation. Because of the criticism he received, Columbus established a new capital, calling it Santo Domingo. He then retreated to Spain to plan yet a third voyage.

## **THE FINAL VOYAGES**

Competition among the explorers was intense. Portugal had sent Vasco da Gama on an expedition in 1497. Unlike Columbus, da Gama really did reach India in 1498. It's thought that this provided the impetus for the sovereigns to approve a third journey for the admiral.

### **A Speed Record**

For his third trip, Columbus organized the entire fleet in roughly four weeks, with the goal of

circumnavigating the world. He left on May 9, 1502, only three months after the new “Governor of the Indies” had been sent off, but he was forbidden to return to Hispaniola.

On Columbus’s third journey, he uncovered Venezuela and the islands of Trinidad and Margarita, and again visited Hispaniola, only to find revolts against his brother’s rule. In 1500, in an effort to restore order and peace, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand sent another governor to Hispaniola. Columbus was arrested and sent back to Spain. Somehow he managed to finagle authorization to undertake a fourth voyage.

Columbus explored the Central American coast for nearly six months in search of the westward passage that remained elusive. He attempted to establish a gold-mining camp in Panama. The natives thwarted these plans, however. He and his men explored Martinique briefly and were shipwrecked off Jamaica, where they remained for a year awaiting rescue.

Finally a ship sent from Hispaniola rescued them. Columbus then set sail for Spain, where he arrived in poor health. During his audience with King Ferdinand (the queen had died), he was rebuffed; the king revoked the admiral’s rights and titles. On May 20, 1506, Christopher Columbus died, still hanging on to the notion that he’d reached Asia.

# **NATIVE AMERICANS**

## **The Original Inhabitants**

It's impossible to know exactly how many people were living in North America at the time of Columbus's arrival in 1492, but it was probably in the region of 25 million. They had, by this time, developed a wide variety of cultures and languages—possibly up to 2,000 tongues were spoken by Native Americans—and had spread across the continent.

Some tribes wandered and survived by hunting and gathering, as had Columbus's distant ancestors in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Others settled in one place. They grew corn and hunted native animals, particularly the buffalo, which roamed the Western plains in enormous numbers. They built houses in some places; for example, the Zuni and Hopi tribes in the Southwest constructed cliff dwellings clinging to the sides of mountains for protection and shelter. They developed styles of art that were reflected in their sculptures and textiles.

## **The Moundbuilders**

From about 3600 B.C. to the time of Columbus, Native American tribes in the Ohio Valley created a series of enormous earthen mounds. These were generally religious in their purpose, but they also expressed the tribes' artistic visions. Some were shaped like animals.