

Land and Liberty I: A Chronology of Traditional American History

The Fundamental Topics of Traditional American History in Chronological
Order Emphasizing Geographical and Economic Issues and the Genesis and
Growth of America's Founding Principles

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Land and Liberty I: A Chronology of Traditional American History

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The American History Project is a program devoted to the reviving of traditional American history in American schools, colleges, and universities.

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To L. Joyce Woodruff-Saxe, winner of the 1938 DAR
(Daughters of the American Revolution) *Citizenship Award*,
Mountain Lakes Junior High School, New Jersey.
My first and best teacher.

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ELEVEN REASONS WHY EVERY STUDENT SHOULD STUDY TRADITIONAL AMERICAN HISTORY¹

1. To understand how and why this nation came to be.
2. To know the foundations of our republican government and the collateral expansion of personal liberty under rule of law.
3. To get the written record straight—to discover the significant events, most important people, essential ideas, and significant turning points of American history.
4. To learn the evolution of our republican principles, ideas, institutions and traditions.
5. To appreciate the men and women whose deeds have enriched our lives and to identify ourselves with the institutions and traditions that have made our nation great.
6. To enjoy the drama in history as it unfolds.
7. To see our country's role in the world.
8. To discover ideas and principles we can use in solving our problems.
9. To perform with greater wisdom the responsibilities of citizenship.
10. To face the future with faith and confidence that the foundation of American freedoms as rooted in our Constitution are secure.
11. To rightfully conform to the legal and moral obligations and expectations consistent with our republican form of government.

¹ Adapted from David S. Muzzey and Arthur S. Link, (1963). *Our American Republic*. Boston, Ginn, p. iii

PREFACE

REVIVING TRADITIONAL AMERICAN HISTORY IN AN AGE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

The *Chronology of Traditional American History* is American history writ large—the way American history and civics used to be taught. The *Chronology* is American history from a traditional perspective. Since the 1960s, American history has been slowly converted by such forms and themes as diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice. In practice, this conversion of educational pursuits has fostered a reflexive criticism and skepticism of American government, law, and institutions. While criticism and skepticism are elements of American citizenship, it is one thing for citizens to be watchful of their government (and traditional approaches encourage that), but quite another for citizens to be taught distortions that foster a rejection of our incredible track toward liberty and freedom.

Although the infusion of inclusion in American history has produced a tremendous amount of scholarship that has enriched our understanding of the past, in the subsequent revision of American history, the emphasis on inclusion has distorted, and in some cases prompted a disregard for historical accuracy. While prevailing models of instruction have been established, a traditional approach to the founding and American history remains vital. In general, traditional American history focuses on the significant in large terms, the turning points, the words and deeds of those who determined the course of American history, and most particularly, our Nation’s founding principles. Certainly, inclusive history remains important for students to study, however, students cannot understand, appreciate, or embrace America’s founding principles without first coming to grip with its grand narrative.

The education establishment has yet to re-embrace traditional American history, however, our Nation’s leaders have recognized that without a heavy dose of traditional American history the Nation may be in serious trouble. Namely, as argued in Congress, if citizens do not have an affection and loyalty to America, and more importantly, do not possess working knowledge of our founding rights in historical context, our liberties and freedoms may be in peril. In response to this perceived crisis, following the leads of Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Congress has infused over 500 million dollars into reviving the teaching of traditional American history (under the Teaching Traditional American History Grant Program and the Presidential and Congressional Academies for American History and Civics Programs).

These bipartisan Congressional efforts signal that Congress does not consider education to be the domain of liberals nor the platform for conservatives. This is an important observation. These half-billion dollar programs are specifically designed to recover traditional American history within the educational establishment. This is not a simple task as this vital industry rejected traditional forms long ago.

At its essence, traditional American history is characterized as:

The installation of patriotism and love of country as the norm, not the exception; Textbooks proudly reflected America as THE exceptional nation; “One nation, one people” defined American heritage; and a common American history provided admiration for national heroes, reverence for America’s founding, promotion of America’s seminal documents; acceptance of America’s founding principles, and respect for America’s law and Constitutional heritage.

The 1960s changed all that. The massive and pervasive social changes directly affected and consumed public education. It was not enough to learn the basics of American history and civics, what was more important was that young citizens become politically activated by their education. Teachers should not just teach about America, they should teach students to change America. And some changes were more valued than others.

In the new education it was important to teach about:

The redistribution of wealth to provide greater access for all;
Promoting social programs to end the suffering of the poor and needy;
Support a woman’s choice over her body;
Provide more opportunities for immigrants to enjoy the fruits of American citizenship;
Level the barriers posed by classical American sovereignty;
Become aware of and a supporter of environment concerns;
Destroy stereotypes on race and gender;
Accept and become inclusive of those with different sexual orientation and other sexual/identity practices.

To activate this new vision of America, the traditional role of the American history teacher had to change. The classroom was no longer a place for providing all children the knowledge, skills, and tools of American heritage for citizenship. To the Congressional sponsors of traditional American history, when it came to citizenship education, applying social justice guidelines, public schools had become more like little political activist camps not places of education. Good people differ on all sorts of cultural, social, and political issues and differ radically. In a nation that prizes and thrives on its diversity of opinions—that citizens can speak out on issues that effect them—public education must be and remain an open forum.

What are my qualifications for this important work? In addition to teaching American history in public schools for eleven years and studying the teaching of American history for the past twenty years as a university professor, I have researched all available state history standards for a Washington D.C. think tank (1998 and 2000),² assisted with the preparation of the American history and civics content outline for the U.S. Citizenship Test for both the Clinton and Bush II administrations respectively, and helped prepare the American history and civics content guide for the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence. In addition, as a member of a state

² David Warren Saxe. (February 1998). *State History Standards An Appraisal of History Standards in 37 States and the District of Columbia*. Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation; and David Warren Saxe, (January 2000). The state of state standards in history. In Chester E, Finn, Jr. and Michael J. Petrilli. *The State of State Standards 2000*. Washington DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

board of education, I helped prepare my state's history standards, as well as assisted with the writing and reviewing of state history standards in another dozen states.

I do not think I approached these tasks with any hidden history Geiger counter in the back of my head that informed me what was and what was not good history. Nonetheless, the question still nagged at me. If I was to judge the content of state history standards or the content of any history intended for public schools, it seemed only fair to write out a template from which I might faithfully measure this work. If I thought a set of state history standards was neglectful of something, I would be better able to critique and make suggestions with a fully fleshed out blueprint, or what I call, a *Chronology* of American history. But the question is begged, if I prepared a fully fleshed out *Chronology* of American history, what would make my *Chronology* more useful than other similar models? This question led to yet another essential question: to what purpose would this project be directed?

To me, the answer was clear; something had to make this “blueprint” stand out from all other would-be blueprints. In other words, the *Chronology* had to be one that would apply to all cases of American history study in all public schools. My *Chronology*, or any blueprint for the matter, *had to be applicable to all public schools*. In fact, taking the case to its logical end, no study of American history could be legitimate if that study was not set by this specific cause: the purpose of studying American history is dictated by the demands of citizenship. And what is this demand? The demand is that every citizen of this nation should be exposed to the essentials/fundamentals of traditional American history in the context of the nation's founding government principles and furthermore it is the obligation of public schools to teach a common American history. It was my devotion to *traditional* American history that would separate this *Chronology* from all others.

What is the authority of such uniform demands and obligations? The authority is found in U.S. Constitution's Article IV, Section 4, “The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government...” There are two basic forms of delivering this “guarantee” to the “States”: (1) Through state and federal laws that promote and perpetuate a “Republican Form of Government” and the enforcement of such laws; and (2) Through public education and effective instruction in the fundamentals of American history and the essentials of American government that are centered on the promotion and perpetuation of the Union of American citizens and their respective states under a “Republican Form of Government.”

Under the implicit Constitutional obligation of Article IV, Section 4, public education in American history is not merely interesting, useful, and desirable, it is absolutely essential for the health and continuation of our sacred Union and the Republic on which that Union stands. In brief, in order to maintain our national health and well-being we are compelled to seek a common, traditional American history.

INTRODUCTION:

LAND AND LIBERTY: A CHRONOLOGY OF TRADITIONAL AMERICAN HISTORY

There are two primary truths of American history:

- (1) There could be no American liberty without available land and able workers; and
- (2) There could be no American nation without a Union of common interests centered on political and religious liberties and freedoms secured by a written Constitution.

In the American context, land and liberty are inseparable concepts. The idea of available land does not mean that the land came uncontested. For the American nation, while there was some uncontested land acquisition and development, there were also four major wars and innumerable bloody incidents between colonists and North America's inhabitants: the Indians. It should be noted that the various Indian tribes held colonists in check and close to the Atlantic Ocean for nearly 150 years. Moreover, from the Jamestown landing and permanent settlement in 1607, the colonists did not overcome Indian populations on the East coast until the early 1700s—more than two hundred years after Columbus.

So who “owns” the land?

The answer is found in the history of American discovery, colonization, and settlement. And that history begins in Europe, not the Americas. Consequently, if there is any fact of history that stands beyond a shadow of doubt it is that American history begins in Europe and more specifically in England. Europeans who found the New World repeatedly referenced the Americas as the *Mundus Novus*, the New World. Throughout North and South America, explorers, conquerors, settlers, and colonists brought their European ways (for good or ill) with them. They brought their European names and they called the New World after the Old: New England, New Spain, New France, New Netherlands and New Sweden. America was viewed as not merely an extension of contemporary European life but also of European history. For example, American-English were no more than Englishmen, American-Swedish, no more than Swedes, and after 1664 all colonists regardless of their nation of origin became de facto “English” citizens. When finally the *English* colonists brought revolution to North America, they brought it in the name and by the authority of *Englishmen* seeking to secure their rights as *Englishmen*, not as Americans seeking to disassociate themselves with alien masters.

When students in the twentieth century read their textbooks, they learned that “America was a child of Europe.” In effect, from the exploits of the Norse (whose records come to us through their *Sagas*), to Columbus (whose records come to us through his personal diaries), to John Cabot's claim to North America in the name of his king, Henry VII of England (whose records

are housed in Britain), until July 4, 1776 (the virtual birth of the United States, an event that is fully documented and readily available for review), the entire run of the American experience is an extension of European history—all of it.

When the United States came into being, the break between European history and a new American history was formalized. In these histories, nearly everything that is known, that was recorded, that we have records for, has come to us from the pens and historical record of European peoples and their colonial descendants. This entire history is incontestably from the perspective of the principal participants largely because *they kept detailed records* and others (Indians, slaves, illiterate men and women) did not.

American history writ large, that is, traditional American history, is the primary history of this nation. It is told from the perspective of the principal participants; it details the beginnings of this nation, the settlement, colonization, struggles and obstacles, eventual independence, establishment of government under our Constitution, and the subsequent expansion of the nation. This history has a singular purpose: to present and instill the vibrancy of America's founding principles, the vitality of liberty and freedom, and the imperative of maintaining our rights.

The idea of political and religious liberty was long in development in England and other parts of Europe, but it took on new and more satisfying dimensions only in America. In brief, the idea of available land without an entrenched land owning system (which offered dim prospects for land in Europe as all land was highly contested) provided not only real opportunities for commoners and nobles to acquire land, but such opportunities combined with the distance from European politics offered the chance for political and religious liberty to grow much more beyond that of noblemen. Whatever liberties existed for European peasants and commoners they paled in comparison to colonial liberties. The vital difference between American colonial liberty in development and that of England and Europe was in the land, that it lay 3,000 miles away from lords and kings, that it was wilderness, it was not settled to any large degree; it was a land that appeared for the taking.

The land and developing democratic politics transformed Europeans into Americans. Life was hard and difficult on the frontiers of Europe in America. There was little opportunity for appeals for help. What counted was the ability to adapt to the conditions of life found in the New World. It was these adaptations to the conditions of the New World, together with religious, political, moral, and social ideas from England and other nations, mixed with hard work, determination, courage, and other characteristics that made America. This history is an accounting of this story: the making of the American nation from the perspective of "Land and Liberty." Throughout history, land has been the animating feature of life. Whether government existed, whether that government was good or bad, all that sustains human beings can be had with land. The prospect that a great, beautiful, and bountiful land lay across the ocean was a dream of astonishing proportions. To the vast majority of humanity in Britain, without land or ever entertaining any hope for land, the idea that any man could live like a baron or that barons could live like kings was a profoundly intoxicating lubricant for immigration.

Whether forced or willing, to all who would trek west to America, the passage was arduous, if not horrific. Disease and death were not assigned by race, class, and gender—the ocean distributed tragedy equally. For the typical two months at sea in little more than a sailboat by today's standards, the accommodations were squalid; the water unbearably foul and dirty; the food meager, rotten, and spoiled; disease rampant and severe. To the elderly and young, the passage was most often a death penalty. Despite the challenges, the remarkable courage, perseverance, and willingness of those who risked all underscores the magnitude of wanderlust. America was a dream-nightmare come true.

Upon reaching America, early settlers encountered a world unknown to them. The very look of America was stunning. From untouched beaches to broad rivers to its towering trees, nothing in their wild imaginations could have prepared them for this experience. Within the realm of their understanding of the world and their place in it, the New World was a paradise, a land of invitation, not limitation. The New World appeared empty and largely unoccupied. On those coming to the new world from the British Empire, we have fairly accurate immigration figures, on those native to the New World (American Indians) population figures are impossible to attain. At best, we guess and suppose there were some 400,000 Indians east of the Mississippi—and that figure and *all purported figures* are merely conjecture since no census records (scientific or otherwise) exist among Indian populations and none were taken by settlers.

Much has been written lately about the high death rates within Indian populations from disease, as if that were confirmation of English exploitation. Disease, like the death rates on the Atlantic crossing, hit all with equal devastation. Despite the look of the inviting land, large proportions of the first settlers to Virginia and Plymouth were killed by disease and the complications of disease. Yet, despite the horrific crossing, the death that awaited many from disease, and the understandably hostile Indians, people came—tens of thousands came. In 1630, the English population stood at a mere 3,800. Hugging the Western coast of the Atlantic Ocean, one hundred years later the number had approached one million. By 1790, over four million people were counted in the first official U.S. Census. No colonial experiment in the history of the world matched the astonishing growth of the English colonies—certainly not the efforts in New France or New Spain.

Combined with the benefits of salutary neglect wherein the restrictive trade laws of England were relaxed and unenforced for more than 100 years, hard working and motivated citizens, blessed by high birth rates, rich soil, and a pleasing climate made perfect the growth of opportunity and enterprise. Again, the success of the English colonies were not duplicated by the French or Spanish or any other combination of settlers.

Other people occupied rich lands but made no such advances on enterprise and opportunity for its citizens. In fact, the Indians in their various tribes made no improvements upon the very land the British were to build its colonies. There were no great (or small) Indian cities in North America; no trading associations, no programs or policies to plan for growth, consolidation, or economic expansion; and no central government. By established European sensibilities, the Indians were, as the settlers found them, a primitive, savage, and by the measure of their culture, inferior people. More importantly, they were, in the European conventions of the time, Godless people, and therefore either in need of spiritual redemption (to those inclined to offer it) or the offspring of Satan (to those who believed such people should be treated accordingly).

On title to the land: By English law the land belonged to the King (by right of discovery). Obviously, upon occupying the land, stronger claims were made by treaty and purchase with Indian people. Whether such claims were fair and just are matters for academic debate. In the real world of colonial life and living, the validity of English land claims were largely reduced to force; the English (and later Americans) fought Indians for the supremacy of North America and the Indians lost pure and simple. In the most basic terms of warfare, those unable to hold land claims hold no rights whatever.

On one hand, to English colonists, the great crime of the Indians was their failure to improve the land. God's law was to go forth and multiply, to improve the land, to plant and harvest, to build. The Indians were no children of God; they failed on all counts. On the other hand, this failure to obey God's dictum was a grand invitation. If the Indians were not going to improve the land, the English settlers would...and they did. On the legal and spiritual leg of *vacuum*

domicilium, (empty land), the English laid virtual claim to the land without moral (or legal) reservations. Where they could, they parlayed treaties and purchases, where such things were impossible or deemed unnecessary, they occupied the land by whatever means. Modern notions of fairness or equity are vastly misplaced in a world governed by other laws—to claim empty land and improve it was God’s work in God’s plan; to let good land sit idle was sinful, a crime against God’s law. After occupation, the settlers fought with great intensity to keep what was now bought with blood. For their turn, Indians largely retreated to the forests.

In time, by the mid-1830s when some 12.5 millions U.S. citizens occupied the then United States, Indian populations east of the Mississippi had dwindled to less than 150,000. These numbers speak volumes. In the conventions of the day, only two outcomes were possible: complete assimilation into the dominant culture or complete annihilation. When assimilation appeared impossible, with the cooperation of the U.S. Congress, President Andrew Jackson took what he held to be the only course of *humane* action to *save* the Indian species, the Indian Removal Act. And, so, the Indians were removed. Within fifty years the three hundred year contest for North America was ended.

While the issue of land title remains a topic of scholarly and ideological speculation for social justice insurgents, to traditionalists the matter is closed. Quite frankly, the Indians lost and nothing short of America losing its title will transfer ownership to some future holder.

So, onto liberty, the real story of American history.

Whatever America was, it was liberty. Here, citizens enjoyed a measure of liberty and freedom unknown in England and Europe (and the rest of the world as well). While under the authority of the King, the King was three thousand miles distant. Even English Parliament and King could not contain the growth and establishment of liberty as practiced in the New World. The colonists were by definition Englishmen, entitled to all the rights and privileges of such people. Yet the elixir of English rights distant from authority mixed with the reality of colonial living, established the seed of independence that even the vaunted English sword could not check. In the ancient spirit of their Anglo-Saxon ancestors, these people would submit to no rule except their own.

This deviant spirit ordained that rights were sacred, that governments required consent to action, and that kings were not above the law, but bound by law. As played out in legislative action by Parliament, English rights and citizen dispositions towards rights and law were a stunning advance of liberty and freedom. By the end of the English Civil Wars (1692, 1688), the die was indelibly cast. Englishmen would not tolerate any rule that did not adhere to the law and its legislative character as drawn from the people. The next “English” civil war would be the American Revolution, fought over the same violated principles that cast England into war in 1642 and 1688.

Whether it was religious freedom, economic opportunity, or plain wanderlust unbound, liberty and freedom animated all. Whether abducted, indentured, or enslaved, in American soil, liberty and freedom could not be extinguish. From the beginning, liberty led the way, a promise of something better in America. From Jamestown in 1607 to Philadelphia on a hot day in July 1776, the spirit of liberty grew and was eventually declared law. With the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, liberty and freedom were secured by millions of Americans.

In time, tens of millions more, the greatest diversity of people in world history, came to enjoyed its fruits. Today, liberty and freedom are available to all. The story of American history is unique in world history; it is an amazing story. And best of all, it is *our* story.

The *Chronology* that follows features this story: an American history writ large, a traditional American history. In advance of the *Chronology* is a sampling of seminal dates with explanations.

Acknowledging that no history or chronology could ever be complete and satisfying to all, readers are invited to expand these lists with other dates and events of equal and greater value, proving the connective power of past events to the present.

USING THE CHRONOLOGY AND INCLUDED MATERIALS

Land and Liberty provides a check on prevailing American histories. Students, instructors, policy makers, educational specialists, curriculum workers, administrators, parents, and other interested parties can compare the American history presented here with American history found in other forms. This is an important task as these groups of people do not have materials such as *Land and Liberty* from which vital comparisons can be had. What knowledge should be taught? What materials can these groups reference to review scholarship in American history and to gain a sense of what traditional American history looks like (that is an updated form of an art that has long disappeared from schools). Traditional American history is making a comeback, at least at the Congressional level with recent American history grant programs specifically targeted to spur the revival and growth of traditional American history. But Congress in all its wisdom has failed to provide a viable model of traditional American history. *Land and Liberty* boldly aspires to be that model.

In addition, there are substantial materials in the back matter of *Land and Liberty*. Information on traditional American history, what was taught in the past (as the “irreducible minimum” in both summary form and testing materials). The highest rated/world class American history standards of the current era are presented in full (Virginia’s History Standards). Sadly, after boldly proclaiming the best state-of-the-art history standards in 1994, government officials bungled, then mangled a revision resulting in a set of sub-standard history standards.

Readers will also find information on mixing geography with history instruction as well as the grading of American history instruction and other information about the essentials of American history.

In sum, the greatest value of *Land and Liberty* is that it cuts new ground by covering old territory and reviving old ideas—ideas and history that encompass traditional American history; traditional content, essential content, the vital content of American citizenship.

The following section introduces the *Chronology* by tracking some seminal dates in the history of land and liberty. From the traditionalist’s perspective, the whole of American history begins in England (and Europe in general) and continues until July 4, 1776 when the American nation is born. Any other “perspective,” that is, one that asserts that American history begins with the Indians or Native Americans, or with a combination of Indians, Africans, and Europeans is nothing more than a twentieth century construction and, according to the historical record, is plainly and patently a distortion.

TOWARD LAND AND LIBERTY: A SAMPLING OF SELECTED DATES WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES

476: Fall of the Roman Empire

Historians typically distinguish between the glory of Rome and its fall with the passing of the last Roman born emperor and the advent of the first “barbarian” or non-Roman emperor. While seemingly arbitrary, this division between Rome and the Germanic invaders has been a widely accepted benchmark of European history throughout the 20th century. Certainly, Romans living at the time might not have perceived the difference between Roman life in 475 and Roman life in 477, but the date is a useful dividing line to call attention to both the Roman world and the beginnings of the medieval world.

From whenever and wherever we mark or trace the fall of Rome and the beginnings of Modern Europe, the position and effects of Imperial Rome eventually dwindle to nothing. By the time Charlemagne (800A.D.) consolidated his conquered lands much of Europe served as the crossroads for swarms of barbarian armies. Industry and trade were destroyed and many of the great Roman cities were in ruin. The flourishing art, education, and literature of Rome was gone as well. Referred to as the “Dark Ages,” the lamps of learning and spirit of enterprise continued, if only dimly and without great effect. While Charlemagne revived good government, built churches and schools, and did much to stabilize a chaotic world, his sons divided his kingdom. While kings claimed lands, they required the assistance of vassals, who divided lands and duties to lesser vassals to consolidate and control these lands. And thus, with the growth of the Church, a feudal world of lords, clergy, and serfs was established. It was in this feudal world where the beginnings of land and liberty took seed.

1075: Pope Gregory VII and Separation of Church and State

Central to American liberty is the notion of “liberty of conscience.” One of the first important acts that set the evolution of this liberty in motion, was Pope Gregory VII’s attempts to reform or more directly free the Roman Catholic Church from would-be control of secular authorities. Gregory VII reforms were directed toward two interrelated goals: first, to elevate the Church over the state by holding kings and secular rulers subject to papal authority, and second, to solidify the authority of the Church under the Pope. In such a medieval world where the Pope effectively “ruled” the souls of *all* men, women and children, all eyes, including kings, were to be fixed on Rome. The concepts of *dogma* (the official position and policy of the Church) and *heresy* (thoughts and actions in violation of the Church) were given currency by Gregory VII’s reforms. As Gregory VII ushered in the notion of *individual responsibility* in the maintenance of official dogma within Church offices, the collateral effect was that all people had religious and political obligations that could be tracked and measured. It is important to note that the Roman Catholic Church dominated medieval life through its unified religious authority and its limiting effects on

diverse political authorities. It is also important to note that the erosion of papal authority together with the spread of the Reformation and Renaissance came to mark the end of the medieval period and the beginnings of the modern. The effect of the Gregorian reforms proved crucial in the events that unfolded as the Reformation. Here, the actions of Luther in central Europe and Henry VIII in England served as springboards for the development of “liberty of conscious” and the founding of the American nation.

1215: Magna Carta and the Track toward Liberty and Freedom

American history begins in Britain and the history of American liberty and freedom starts with Magna Carta. On first glance, when King John signed Magna Carta into “law,” the barons and freeholders (men who held title to lands) secured rights for themselves, not the masses. In fact, Magna Carta was little more than confirmed supremacy of barons over serfs, assuring continued oppression and misery. Ironically, in advance of Magna Carta, it was the king (Henry) who had been consolidating his authority (and improving the lot of the masses) over his feuding and power-loving barons. As Henry and his sons Richard “the Lionhearted” (the noble one) and John (the bad guy in all the Robin Hood movies) sought to assert more authority (and thus reduce the stress caused by the chaotic political situation created by the barons) the barons took the opportunity to force the king (in this case, John) to sign the great charter. John signed, but he immediately renounced his promises to the barons and the kings who followed John ignored Magna Carta. While promises were ignored, what was not and could not be ignored were the ideas nestled in Magna Carta; principally, that law was supreme, not rulers; that citizens are entitled to due process, use of grand juries, and in general that known law (even bad law) is better than arbitrary rule of kings. Law engenders social and economic stability. If citizens know the law and its punishments, they can adjust their lives accordingly. If the law is whatever the ruler says it is, adjustment is not possible. And so, Magna Carta opened the rights box and its contents once released could not be extinguished.

1453: Fall of Constantinople

The Ottoman Turks overwhelmed the once impregnable Christian fortress city of Constantinople; the gateway to the East, to luxury goods, fine woods, spices, jewels, and riches. The result was profound: When the conditions proved right, the Atlantic kingdoms of Portugal, Spain, France, and England would turn their energies West, toward a New World soon to be found.

1488: Dias Rounds the Cape of Good Hope

Dias returns to Portugal, having rounded the Cape of Good Hope at the tip of South Africa, confirming an alternative eastern route to the East. Portugal establishes its maritime effects toward the South to Africa and the East to the Indies. The result forces Spain, France, England, and other seafaring nations and interests to turn West.

1492: Columbus Discovers America

Columbus capitalizes on his knowledge, available technology, and political conditions that allowed for voyages of discovery. Few dates in history carry the distinction of ushering in a completely new era of history. This date, 1492, is clearly among the most preeminent dates of human history. While the Vikings discovered North America in 1000, America, as Mark Twain wrote, “did not stay discovered” until Columbus and his 1492 voyage. Columbus’ voyage in 1492 arguably altered all human history throughout the entire world. Certainly, given the restlessness and exploration minded Europeans, America was to be discovered by the West at some point in history, but it was Columbus who accomplished this task. One further note on the word “discovered.” For modern readers, discovery has come to be defined as to “uncover” or “find” something. Hence, it has been said (and rightfully so given this definition) that it is wrong to claim that the Vikings or Columbus “discovered” America because such a statement denies the existence of the native populations of Indians (so identified by Columbus). In actuality, however, “discover” in its rightful contemporary definition was to “disclose” or “reveal.” Therefore, the Vikings and Columbus discovered or disclosed or revealed America without doing harm to the notion that the Indians already occupied the land.

The claim that Columbus brought slavery into the New World or that Columbus was somehow responsible for the creation of African slavery is, of course, untrue. Slavery was common throughout the world: well established in Africa, Asia, and the Americas long before Columbus was born. It is important to note that the first to question and criticize slavery were Europeans (and they did that at the very beginning of slavery in the New World) and it was Europeans (not Africans, Asians, or other people) who were the first to ban its application.

1517: Martin Luther’s Dictum, “Liberty of Conscience”

In 1517, a Catholic priest named Martin Luther posted his *Ninety-five Theses* on the doors of the Wittenberg Church in the hope of bringing reform to the Roman Catholic Church. Finding Luther’s persistent protest against Church practices untenable, the Pope expelled and excommunicated Luther in 1521. A trial was set to determine Luther’s Earthly fate; if convicted of heresy, Luther would be put to death. Luther, however, held fast to his belief that, as Augustine had written, “no one can or ought to be forced to believe anything against his will.” When Luther told his accusers that it was wrong for individuals to act against their own conscious beliefs, unwittingly (or maybe not) Luther sowed the seeds for one of the most powerful activators in human history: the principle of *liberty of conscience*. In his “*From Secular Authority* (published January 1, 1523), Luther cogently argued “[Church and government officials] do not realize what a pointless and impossible thing they are attempting. However, strict their orders, and however much they rage, they cannot force people to do more than obey by word and deed; they cannot compel the heart, even if they were to tear themselves apart trying . . . All they achieve is to force people with weak conscience to lie, to perjure themselves, saying one thing while in their hearts they believe another . . . it would be much easier, although it may mean allowing their subjects to fall into error, just to let them err, rather than force them to lie and profess what they do not believe in their hearts. And it is not right to prevent one evil by doing another, even worse, one.” Within two hundred and sixty years, Luther’s “liberty” principle was given full expression and application in America’s founding as was evidenced in Thomas Jefferson’s *Virginia Statue for Religious Freedom* (1786), “Almighty God has created the mind free . . . that all attempts to