

# Glossary

abolitionist

civil rights

## A

- abolitionists:** people who favored abolition, the ending of slavery
- adapt:** to change in order to survive in a new or different environment or situation
- AIDS:** a disease marked by a weakening of the body's immune system, or its ability to fight off life-threatening illnesses
- aliens:** people who have come from other countries and are not yet citizens
- ally:** a nation that joins another nation in some common effort, such as winning a war
- amendment:** a change to the constitution
- annex:** To add a territory to a country. Such an addition is called an *annexation*.
- anti-Semitism:** Prejudice against Jews. The term comes from *Semite*, a word for ancient peoples of the Middle East, including the ancestors of modern Jews.
- arms race:** a competition to develop and manufacture more and more powerful weapons
- arsenal:** a place where weapons and ammunition are stored
- Articles of Confederation:** The first written plan of government for the United States. A "confederation" is an association of states who cooperate for common purpose.
- assembly:** an elected group of lawmakers
- atomic bomb:** an immensely powerful weapon whose violent energy comes from splitting the atom (the basic unit of matter)

## B

- baby boom:** a large increase in the number of babies born in proportion to the size of a population
- bicameral:** Having two lawmaking parts. *Bicameral* comes from Latin words meaning "two rooms."
- bill:** a proposed law
- Bill of Rights:** a formal listing of the basic rights of citizens
- bipolar:** organized around two opposite extremes
- bond:** A government certificate that pays interest. Selling bonds is a way for the government to raise money temporarily for some public purpose.
- boycott:** To refuse to buy one or more goods from a certain source. An organized refusal by many people is also called a boycott.

## C

- capitalism:** an economic system based on private ownership of farms and businesses
- carpetbaggers:** northerners who went to the South after the Civil War to gain money and political power
- cash crops:** crops, such as tobacco, sugar, and cotton, raised in large quantities in order to be sold for profit
- checks and balances:** the system that allows each branch of government to limit the powers of the other branches
- civil rights:** the rights that the Constitution entitles all people to as citizens, especially equal treatment under the law

**civil servants:** employees of the government

**civil war:** a war fought between the people of a single country

**class:** A part of society defined by such qualities as wealth, occupation, and inherited titles or honors. A society may have an upper class, a middle class, and a lower class.

**Cold War:** the global struggle for power and influence between the United States and the Soviet Union that followed World War II

**colony:** a new settlement or territory established and governed by a country in another land

**communism:** an economic system based on the idea that farms and businesses should be owned in common by the workers who do the labor

**compromise:** an agreement in which both sides in a dispute agree to give up something they want in order to achieve a settlement

**Confederacy:** the independent country declared by 11 southern states, who called themselves the Confederate States of America

**conquistadors:** Spanish soldier-explorers, especially those who conquered the native peoples of Mexico and Peru

**constitution:** a written plan that provides the basic framework of a government

**consumer goods:** products intended for personal use by consumers, such as cars, refrigerators, and vacuum cleaners

**containment:** the U.S. policy of fighting the spread of communism by limiting it to countries where it already existed

**converts:** people who accept a new religion

**corporation:** a business that is owned by many investors

**cotton gin:** a hand-operated machine that cleans seeds and other unwanted material from cotton

**counterculture:** a way of life that runs counter to (against) society's traditional culture

**credit:** an arrangement in which a seller trusts a buyer to repay part of an item's purchase price over time

**cultural region:** an area in which a group of people share a similar culture and language

**culture:** a people's way of life, including beliefs, customs, food, dwellings, and clothing

## D

**D-day:** a day specified for launching an operation, such as the Allied invasion of Normandy

**Declaration of Sentiments:** A formal statement of injustices suffered by women, written by the organizers of the Seneca Falls convention. *Sentiments* means "beliefs" or "convictions."

**defendants:** people who are required to defend themselves in a legal action; an example is an accused person who is put on trial for a crime

**democratic:** Ruled by the people. In a democracy, citizens elect representatives to make and carry out laws.

**depression:** a period of low economic activity and high unemployment

**dictator:** a ruler who has absolute power

**diplomacy:** The art of conducting negotiations with other countries. People who engage in diplomacy are called *diplomats*.

**discrimination:** unequal treatment based on a person's race, gender, religion, place of birth, or other arbitrary characteristic

**doctrine:** a statement of official government policy, especially in foreign affairs

**draft:** a system for requiring citizens to join their country's armed forces

## E

**Electoral College:** The group established by the Constitution to elect the president and vice president. Voters in each state choose their electors.

**emancipation:** the act of freeing people from slavery

**embargo:** a government order that stops merchant ships from leaving or entering a country's ports

**environment:** all of the physical surroundings in a place, including land, water, animals, plants, and climate

**environmentalists:** people who are actively concerned with protecting the environment

**executive branch:** the part of government that "executes" (carries out) the laws

**expansionists:** Americans who favored extending the United States' power by taking control of new territories

## F

**federalism:** the constitutional system that shares power between the national and state governments

**feminists:** people who are actively concerned with achieving social, political, and economic equality for women

**First Great Awakening:** a revival of religious feeling and belief in the American colonies that began in the 1730s

**foreign policy:** guidelines for how a country handles political and economic interactions with other countries

**forty-niners:** the people (almost all young men) who joined the rush for gold in California in 1849

**freedmen:** African Americans who had been set free from slavery

**fugitive:** a person who flees or tries to escape (for example, from slavery)

## G

**guerrillas:** soldiers who operate on their own and are not part of a regular army

## H

**habeas corpus:** a written order from a court that gives a person the right to a trial before being jailed

**heritage:** the traditional beliefs, values, and customs of a family or country

**Holocaust:** the mass murder of European Jews and other victims by Adolf Hitler and his followers

**homestead:** a plot of land where pioneers could build a home, farm, or ranch

**homesteader:** a farmer who is given a plot of public land (called a *homestead*) in return for cultivating it

## I

**immigrant:** A person who moves from one country to live in another. Such a movement is called *immigration*.

**impeach:** to formally accuse an official of a crime related to official duties

**imperialism:** the policy of extending a nation's power by gaining political and economic control over other countries

**inauguration:** a formal ceremony to mark the beginning of something, such as a president's term of office

**indentured servant:** A person who signed an indenture, or an agreement to work for a master for a period of years. Indentured servants were not free until they completed their term of service.

**independence:** freedom from control by another government or country

**Industrial Revolution:** The dramatic change in economies brought about by the use of machines to do work formerly done by hand. The Industrial Revolution began in England in the late 1700s and spread to America and the rest of Europe.

**industrialization:** the birth and growth of businesses that make and distribute products through the use of machinery

**inflation:** An increase in the amount of money in circulation, compared to the goods available for purchase. Inflation reduces the value of money and causes prices to rise.

**integration:** the blending of all people as equals; the opposite of segregation

**Internet:** a network that allows computers in locations around the world to share information

**internment camps:** places where people are forcibly confined

**irrigation:** a system for bringing water to farmland by artificial means, such as using a dam to trap water and ditches to channel it to fields

**isolationism:** a policy of avoiding political or military agreements with other countries; first established by George Washington

## J

**Jim Crow laws:** Laws enforcing segregation of blacks and whites in the South after the Civil War. "Jim Crow" was a black character in an entertainer's act in the mid-1800s.

**judicial branch:** the part of government, consisting of the Supreme Court and lower federal courts, that interprets the laws

## L

**legislative branch:** The lawmaking part of government, called the *legislature*. To *legislate* is to make a law.

**Loyalists:** American colonists who were loyal to the British government

## M

**Manifest Destiny:** the belief that it was America's right and duty to spread across the North American continent

**mercenaries:** professional soldiers who fight for anyone who will pay them

**migrate:** To move from one place and establish a home in a new place. A move of a large number of people is called a *migration*, and the people are called *migrants*. Some animals are also said to migrate, usually with the seasons.

**militarism:** a policy of glorifying military power and military ideas and values

**militia:** a small army made up of ordinary citizens who are available to fight in an emergency

**mission:** A place established by missionaries for their work. A typical California mission included such things as a church, a residence, workshops, and large areas of land for raising crops.

**missionaries:** people who travel to a territory or community in order to make converts to their religion

**monopoly:** a company that controls all production and sales of a particular product or service

**Mormons:** Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. "Latter-day" means "modern," while "saints" are people who dedicate their lives to following God's teachings.

## N

**nationalism:** devotion to a national or ethnic identity, including the desire for independence from rule by foreign countries

**natural resources:** useful materials found in nature, including water, vegetation, animals, and minerals

**neutrality:** a policy of not choosing sides in a war or dispute between other countries

**New Deal:** the set of programs adopted under the Roosevelt administration to combat the Great Depression of the 1930s

**New World:** The European name for the Americas. These continents were a “new” world for the Europeans, but not for the native peoples who lived there.

**non-aligned nations:** countries that refused to side with either the United States or the Soviet Union during the Cold War

**nullify:** To refuse to recognize a federal law. This action by a state is called *nullification*.

## O

**oppression:** the feeling of being weighed down or held back by severe and unfair forces

**Oregon Trail:** an overland route that stretched about 2,000 miles from Independence, Missouri, to the Columbia River in Oregon

## P

**Parliament:** the lawmaking body of England, consisting of representatives from throughout the kingdom

**party:** an organized political group

**passport:** a document issued by a citizen’s home government that identifies a person and permits him or her to travel to other countries

**Patriots:** American colonists who believed that the colonies had the right to govern themselves

**pension:** a sum of money paid to a retired person, usually on a monthly basis

**petition (noun):** a formal, written request

**petition (verb):** to make a formal demand or request

**plantation:** a large area of privately owned land where crops were grown through the labor of workers, usually slaves, who lived on the land

**pogroms:** Organized and often violent persecutions of minority groups. The word *pogrom* comes from Russian words meaning “like thunder.”

**popular sovereignty:** the idea that the authority of government comes from the people

**Progressive movement:** a political reform effort of the early 1900s that focused on improving American life by fighting for such causes as equal rights, better working conditions, and protection of wilderness areas

**Prohibition:** A ban on the production, sale, and transport of alcoholic beverages under the Eighteenth Amendment. The amendment was repealed in 1933.

**proxy wars:** wars in which the superpowers backed different sides that acted as substitutes (proxies) for the superpowers themselves

**public schools:** schools that are paid for by taxes and managed by local government for the benefit of the general public

**Puritans:** People who wanted to “purify” the English Church. Puritans wanted to simplify the Church’s ceremonies and its ranks of authority.

## Q

**quota:** a limit based on numbers or proportions—for example, the proportion of a country’s population allowed to immigrate to the United States

## R

**racism:** prejudice based on race

**ranch:** A grant of land made by the Mexican government. Most ranchos were used for raising cattle and crops.

**ratify:** To formally approve a plan or an agreement. The process of approval is called *ratification*.

**Reconstruction:** the period after the Civil War when the federal government ruled the southern states in order to rebuild them and allow them back into the Union

**reformers:** people who work to correct failings or injustices

**refugees:** people who flee their homes or countries because of war, persecution, or other causes

**regulation:** the enforcement of laws that control conduct or practices; government regulations control the way goods, food, and drugs are produced and sold to the public

**reparations:** debts imposed on a defeated nation to pay for the harm done during a war

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

**republic:** a country governed by elected representatives

**reservation:** An area of land set aside ("reserved") by the government for Native Americans. Reservations generally were on poor land that settlers didn't want.

**Revolutionary War:** The struggle of the former British colonies in America to gain their independence from Britain. Also called the War for Independence or the American Revolution.

**rights:** powers or privileges that belong to people as citizens and that cannot or should not be taken away by the government

## S

**scalawags:** white southerners who supported the federal government after the Civil War

**secede:** to withdraw from an organization or alliance; in this case, to withdraw from the United States

**secession:** the act of withdrawing from an organization or alliance, such as the withdrawal of the southern states from the Union

**Second Great Awakening:** A revival of religious feeling and belief in the 1820s and 1830s. The First Great Awakening swept through the American colonies in the 1700s.

**secretary of state:** The head of the State Department, who oversees matters relating to foreign countries. The secretary of state is an important member of the president's cabinet.

**sedition:** the crime of encouraging rebellion against the government

**segregation:** the social separation of groups of people, especially by race

**self-incrimination:** the act of giving testimony that can be used against oneself

**self-made:** achieving wealth or influence through one's own effort rather than being born to a privileged family

**sit-in:** a form of peaceful protest in which people occupied seats in a segregated facility

**slavery:** The treatment of people as property for the purpose of forcing them to do labor. People who are denied freedom in this way are called *slaves* and are said to be *enslaved*.

**slave trade:** the business of capturing, transporting, and selling people as slaves

**Social Darwinism:** the idea that people and societies compete for survival, with the fit becoming wealthy and successful while the weak struggle to survive

**spoils system:** the practice of rewarding political supporters with government jobs

**states' rights:** All rights kept by the states under the Constitution. Supporters of states' rights sometimes argued that states were not obliged to honor federal laws that they believed violated the Constitution.

**strategy:** An overall plan (for example, for winning a war). Specific ways of carrying out a strategy are called *tactics*.

**suffrage:** the right to vote

## T

---

**tariff:** a tax imposed by the government on goods imported from another country

**tenement buildings:** crowded and usually run-down buildings with many small, cheap apartments

**territory:** A region designated by Congress and organized under a governor. A territory may apply to become a state when it has a large enough population.

**trade unions:** early labor organizations that brought together workers in the same trade, or job, to fight for better wages and working conditions

**tradition:** a belief, custom, or way of doing something that has existed for a long time

**traitor:** person guilty of the crime of treason, or disloyalty to the government

**transcontinental railroad:** a railroad that crosses a continent (*trans* means "across")

**trappers:** adventurers who capture and kill animals, such as beavers, for their fur

**treaty:** a formal agreement between nations

**trust:** a group of corporations that unite in order to reduce competition and control prices in a business or industry

**tyranny:** The unjust use of government power. A ruler who uses power in this way is called a *tyrant*.

**the Union:** The United States as one country, united under a single government. During the Civil War, "the Union" came to mean the government and armies of the North.

## U

---

**urbanization:** the growth of cities

## V

---

**veto:** To reject a proposed law, or a bill. Only the president can veto bills.

**visas:** government documents that allow people from other nations to enter the country for a limited period of time

## W

---

**warrant:** an order from a judge that authorizes police or other officials to take a certain action, such as searching someone's property

**well-born:** born to an upper-class (wealthy, respected) family

## Y

---

**yellow journalism:** the practice of publishing sensational and often exaggerated news stories in order to attract readers