

III. Connecting Ancient History and the World We Live In

A. You Are Here!

1. Present-centrism states that we study the ancient past because of “where” and “when” we are.
2. One aspect of this is that living in an advanced society means that we don’t need to worry about meeting our basic needs (food, water, etc.) and we can take the time to learn about other values. (A person starving in a poor country, by contrast, would have no use for ancient history!)
3. Similarly, a person living in a different *time* would have a different need than ours, especially if one was living in a society prior to 1776, where there is no freedom. This does not mean one would not study it. But the connection between past and present would be different.
4. So what is it about where we are specifically that makes ancient history important? There are various reasons, but one stands out above all: the United States of America is a republic (a country with a unique form of government) that most people think of as a democracy (another form of government). None of this was invented by Americans. It was learned from the ancients! (See Section IV below for definitions.)

B. The Anchor Facts of Ancient History

1. Living in America, and (even for those who are not American) in an *America-centric world* means that we should study ancient history to learn more about how America became a republic after its birth on the **4th of July, 1776**. This is the first “anchor fact” of ancient history (a fact that connects us here in the present to the past).
2. The next most important fact that connects us to the ancient past is the discovery of America by Columbus in **1492**. Without this discovery, no Europeans would have come to America, or been in America in 1776 to create a new country. There was no ancient history in the Americas. The primitive natives still lived in the pre-historic “stone age” and had no awareness of any ancient past. Ancient history only became a part of life in America when Europeans arrived.
3. European history connects us to the ancient past, because it was European barbarians that destroyed the ancient world! They caused the fall of the Roman Empire in **476 AD**, which led to *the Dark Ages*, and, after *the Renaissance* (rebirth) of Greek & Roman ideas, the rise of the modern world we live in.
4. Our connection to the ancient past importantly involves the religion of Christianity. The very calendar that we use to mark events today and in ancient times revolves around the birth of Jesus Christ. Events that happened before he was born are marked “BC” on the calendar, which means “Before Christ.” Events that come after are marked “AD,” which means “Anno Domini” (a Latin expression that means “in the year of our Lord”). According to the best determination historians can make,

Jesus was actually born **c.4 BC**. Despite this fact, the calendar has not been changed, because no one is really sure.

5. Using the Christian calendar is what allows us to understand what it means to say that the Founding Fathers of the United States created a republic after the example of the first republic, the Roman Republic of **c.509 BC**. They were also interested in the democracy of ancient Athens (in Greece) from **c.508 BC**. The history of these governments was the most important resource for the founders in creating the United States.
6. Our final connection to the ancient world is the milestone that marks the beginning of history itself, or, the point where ancient history begins. This tells us how big ancient history, or how much there is to consider, so that we can decide what to focus on. Ancient history begins **c.3000 BC** in ancient Egypt. In that year, an Egyptian “pharaoh” (king) unified the two halves of Egypt, upper and lower Egypt together for the first time. We know this because the Egyptians kept records using their special form of writing, and those records allow us to be connected to this event even though it happened over 5000 years ago!