

III. Anchoring Our Awareness of the Past

A. How did our *interconnected* world come to be?

1. To learn about the past without getting lost in the “ocean” of available information, we need to “anchor” our studies to facts that relate as strongly as possible to the present and the world around us. This is crucial to ensuring that we maintain the connection between the past and the present in our own thinking.
2. If we want to understand how there came to be a United States *of America* in an *interconnected world*, we need look no further than the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492.
 - a) This event, depicted in our *History Through Art* painting by Karl von Piloty, was when the Americas became connected to the rest of the world for this first time.
 - b) Although there were people living in the Americas, and others had occasionally traveled there from afar, the lives of people on these isolated continents remained completely separate until 1492.
 - c) After 1492, Europeans began to explore the Americas, and even to sail between them and Asia (across the Pacific ocean.)
 - d) Soon, European settlers began to make new lives for themselves in the Americas, creating a permanent connection between America and Europe, which is still part of our lives today — including the fact that people speak Spanish and Portuguese in South America, and that people speak English in America.
 - e) Without Columbus’s discovery of 1492, there simply would never have been a United States of America. *Everything in American history, including the world we live in, ultimately connects back to this event.*
3. Referring back to this event will always be helpful in understanding the story of America and how the world we live in came to be the way that it is. *Because it is so useful in this way, Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America is our first “historical anchor” or “anchoring fact”.*

B. How did the *America-centric* world we live in come to be?

1. The United States of America is by far the most important country in the world today.
 - a) It is the *richest* country in the world (in terms of the combined wealth of its people). This wealth is the reason so many things in America are made elsewhere, such as China. America’s wealth makes it the most important nation of “consumers” in the world. Everyone wants to export what they produce to Americans capable of buying them.
 - b) The US is also *by far the most powerful* country in the world, with a military capability that is greater than those of the other countries of the world combined. It has aircraft carriers that roam the world’s oceans at all times. It has a vast nuclear arsenal. Its military vastly overmatches that of any, and probably *all*, the other countries in the world.

- c) It is the most *culturally influential* country in the world.
 - i) America movies, music, and television are the most popular in the world.
 - ii) American restaurants and food brands, such as MacDonaldis and Coca-Cola are the most popular in the world.
 - iii) America has long stood as a beacon of freedom to the world. People admire America as a symbol of liberty, as represented by the statue of liberty.
 - iv) America's cultural influence is connected to its wealth and power. In the twentieth century, for instance, America literally saved the world during the World Wars. America emerged from these wars as the leading nation in the world.
2. For these reasons and more, people say that the world is "America-centric." America is not literally in the center of the world in any strict geographical sense, but it is the hub of world trade, the only superpower in the military balance of power between nations, and the world's pre-eminent culture.
3. The birth of the United States is thus an historical anchor fact of world history. There cannot be a more important topic in history than the arrival and history of the greatest nation in the history of the world, which is so disproportionately important in the world today.
4. The United States was born on the 4th of July, 1776—*Independence Day*.

C. But where does America fit in the "big picture"?

1. To understand American history more fully, it is important to know where the story of America fits in the story of the *world*. This sets the context for understanding and appreciating the uniqueness of America in all of history.
2. Recorded history stretches back over 5000 years! Since we live around 2000 AD, if we subtract 5000 from that, we end up with 3000 less than "zero." When dates this far back are written to show this, the dates are marked "BC." (We will see why soon.) Also, when we don't know a year for certain, the year is indicated with a "c." in front of it, which stands for "circa." "Circa" is an ancient Latin word that means "about" or "approximately."
3. C.3000 BC the first key event in recorded history occurred. The country of Egypt was first brought under the rule of one man, a pharaoh (king) named Menes/Narmer. (I use this strange way of writing his name because the legends about him call him "Menes," and the best kept records in history call him "Narmer.")
4. So here we are living in an *interconnected, globalized, America-centric* world five thousands years into the story of recorded human history.