

## **II. Two Dimensions and Two Stories**

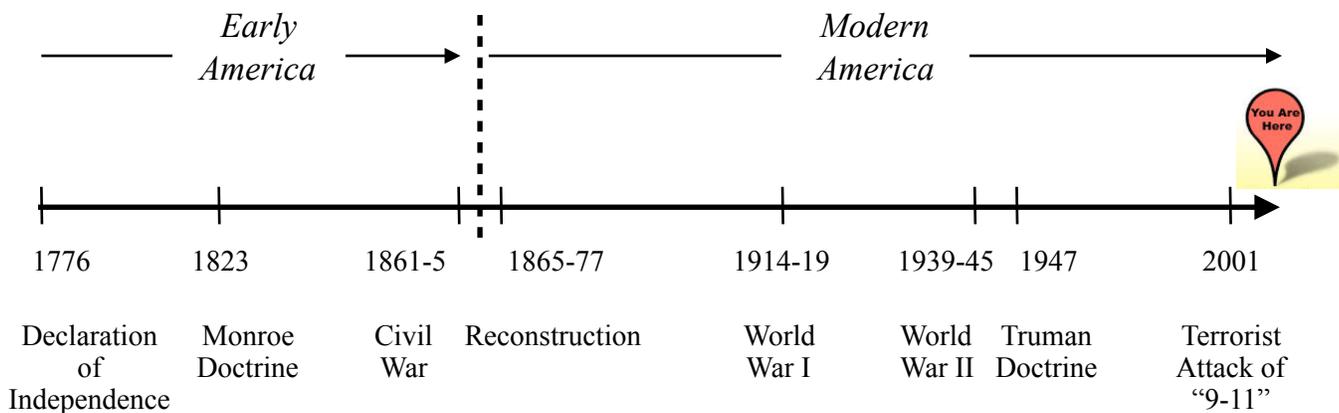
### A. Two Major Aspects of American History

1. Thus far we have focussed on the most historically significant dimension of American history, namely America's unprecedented rise to the status of world police power.
2. While this story dominates modern world history, it is obvious that focussing exclusively on this dimension of American life would not give us a complete picture of the world we live in.
3. To expand our awareness of American history in the most productive direction, we must now focus on an internal issue, an issue that has profoundly shaped America itself. It is the issue of "civil rights," which continues to shape American culture to this day. (Among the controversial topics in America today concerning civil rights are the rights of immigrants—including "illegal immigrants"—to obtain citizenship and to vote; the proposed rights to healthcare and education (including "free" college education), and even the right to high speed Internet access.)
4. American history can be divided into two eras—"Early" American history and "Modern" American history—based on the combination of two things especially: its relationship to the world, and its own culture.

### B. Early America and Modern America from the Perspective of Civil Rights

1. The story of civil rights in America is rooted in the ideas of the Founding Fathers—especially the concept of individual rights they explained in the *Declaration of Independence*. But it is also rooted in an important failure in the founding of the United States: the failure to eradicate the inheritance of slavery from European civilization when the country was born.
2. Slavery had gone fundamentally unchallenged in human history from pre-historical and tribal times all the way through ancient and medieval history. Slave labor has been used to build the pyramids of Egypt, the great wall of China, the Roman colosseum, and the Taj Mahal of India. It existed in literally every civilization on Earth and had been transplanted to the Americas by all the European empires, especially in the form of the "Atlantic Slave Trade" whereby people from Africa were enslaved and brought to America against their will.
3. By the time of the American Revolution, slavery had been abolished in certain states in America, but not others. Thus it was included in the way of life of a significant part of the new United States despite the dedication of the country to a new concept of freedom.
4. Thus Early American culture has two essential attributes:
  - a) political separation, in defense of the rights of Americans
  - b) a strange and unstable mixture of individual rights and slavery
5. This combination lasted until those Americans most dedicated to freedom could no longer tolerate slavery as a part of their culture and fought the *Civil War (1861-5)* to end it.

6. The details of this great contest will be of interest to us in the months to come, but for now, the key to this event is that it is an **anchor fact** of American history: it explains why America is a culture that no longer has slavery, but instead is a country absorbed by great debates over “civil rights.” (An easy way to think of it is: *civil* rights begin with the *civil* war.)
7. To anchor our awareness of this new reality, we need to mark the beginning of the era of civil rights with the full and final eradication of slavery *after* the Civil War, and the first ever assignment of “civil rights” to a group that never possessed them before: former slaves.
8. The beginning of the Civil Rights *Era* in American history (and thus of the “Modern” Era of American history) lies in the ***Reconstruction Period (1865-77)*** following the Civil War.
9. As the name suggests, the Reconstruction period involved the rebuilding of the American apparatus of government in such a way that slavery would be forever banished. To do so involved three changes to the American system of laws which are known as “constitutional amendments.” These were:
  - a) the 13th amendment - abolished slavery in the United States
  - b) the 14th amendment - made all former slaves *citizens*
  - c) the 15th amendment - gave the right to vote to former slaves
10. The following timeline can serve to represent the summary of American history that we will use as we more forward in our studies. It includes both America’s rise to world police power and its own internal transformation—both transitions being necessary to understand tWWLi.



11. Modern America is thus a country that has evolved from its early form to become diminutively different in two ways (among others, of course):
  - a) a country that polices the world
  - b) a country of unalienable individual rights *and* civil rights (such as the right to vote)