

II. Two Dimensions and Two Stories

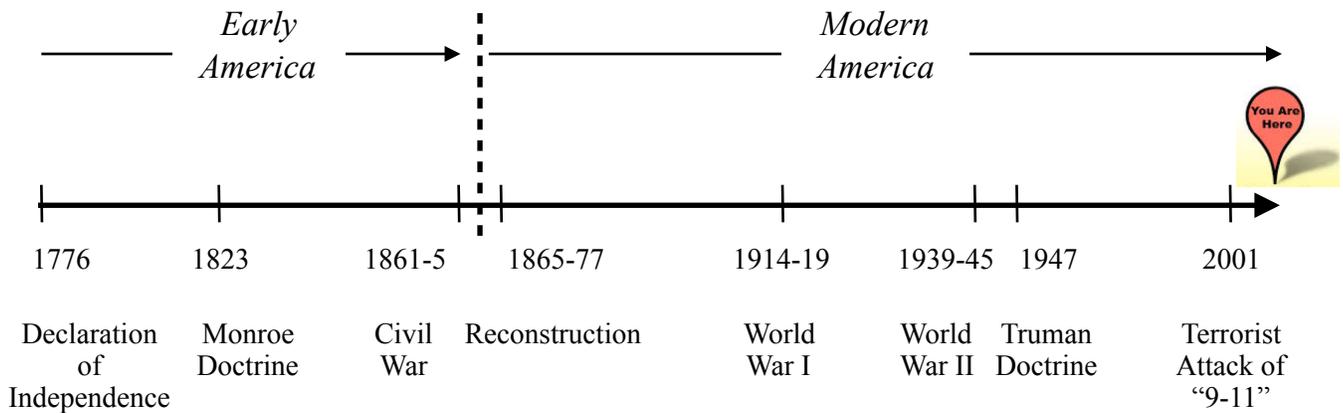
A. Two Major Aspects of American History

1. Thus far we have focussed on the most important dimension of American history: the rise of the world police power.
2. Focussing only on this dimension of American life would not give us a complete picture of the world we live in, however.
3. To start thinking about American history in other ways, 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.
4. If we combine the issue of “civil rights” with the issue of America’s relationship to the world, we can see how American history can be divided into two eras: “Early” American history and “Modern” American history.

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

1. Although the Founding Fathers believed in individual rights, their America was not an America of “civil rights.” The America they created still had slavery in it.
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 in America in particular, Europeans had brought slaves from Africa 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. Civil rights were granted to former slaves for the first time *after* the Civil War. This time in American history is known as the ***Reconstruction Period (1865-77)***.
8. As the name suggests, the Reconstruction period involved the rebuilding America—without slavery. To do so required 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
9. The following timeline summarizes the two phases of American history so far including *both* America’s rise to world police power and its own internal transformation towards civil rights.



10. Modern America is thus a country that has evolved from its early form to become distinctly 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)