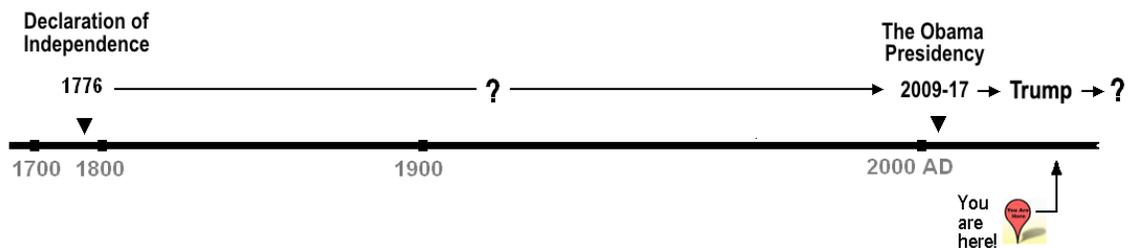


III. The Original United States of America

A. The Birth of the United States: The Declaration of Independence (1776)

1. The story of the United States begins with the *Declaration of Independence* by America's leaders on the 4th of July, 1776.
2. The *Declaration*, written by Thomas Jefferson, said why Americans were breaking away from the control of its mother country, Great Britain.
3. The *Declaration* says that governments must protect the “inalienable” *natural rights* of individuals to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” (“Inalienable” means that something is a part of you and cannot be made separate or “alien” from you.)
4. This was the original American social contract, which now goes at the beginning of the timeline:

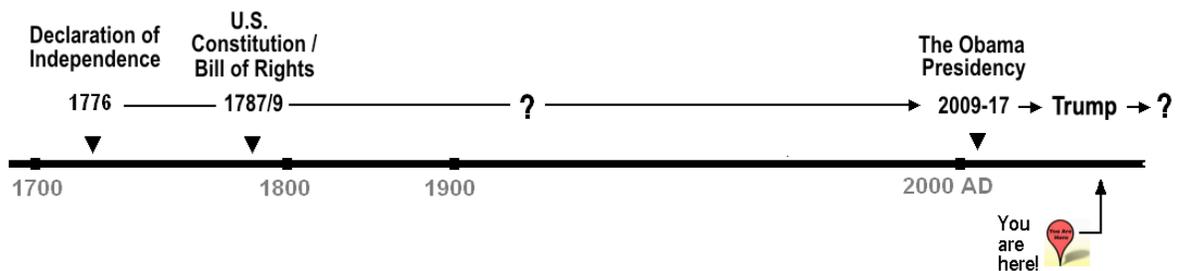


B. The Inheritance of Slavery

1. Although the *Declaration of Independence* says that “all men are created equal” and that all individuals possess the same natural rights, the United States was formed in a time when slavery was still practiced throughout the world and was considered normal.
2. Because we live in a time when slavery is no longer normal, and seems plainly wrong, it is difficult to imagine what it would be like to live in a time when that was not true.
3. Even so, starting in ancient times, from ancient Egypt & Mesopotamia, to Greece and Rome, and through to medieval Europe, slavery was normal.
4. When tribes or kingdoms conquered one another, or when poor people desperate for food needed to survive, some people became the slaves of others.
5. It is surprising for many people to learn that the Christian Bible and texts of other religions like Judaism and Islam treat slavery as merely a fact of life.
6. By the time of the American Revolution, the use of slave labor had ended in some colonies, but in others, especially in the southern colonies, where growing crops such as tobacco and cotton required large numbers of laborers, slavery had been continued.
7. The peculiar challenge of the founding of the United States as a country with a revolutionary social contract of natural rights announced in the *Declaration of Independence* was what to do about inheritance of slavery.

C. A Moral Compromise in the Name of a “More Perfect Union”

1. After the *Declaration of Independence* of 1776, five of the *states*—New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts—abolished slavery within their *states*.
2. In eight of the original thirteen states, however, slavery continued at that time.
3. This difference, among others might have led the colonies to become separate *countries*.
4. The top priority of the Founding Fathers, therefore, was to unite the colonies into a single country permanently so they would not become rivals or enemies.
5. The new set of laws they made is known as the Constitution (1787) created a “federal” government, with a congress of representatives to make laws for the whole country, along with a president, and a court system.
6. To avoid their disagreement over slavery, that problem was left out of the Constitution.
7. It was also left out of the *Bill of Rights*, created in 1789, which protects the rights of American citizens (such as freedom of speech, and the “right to bear arms”).
8. Together, the *Constitution* (1787) and the *Bill of Rights* (1789) became the social contract for a truly *United States of America*.



D. The Rise of Independent America

1. When George Washington was elected the first president of the United States according to its new constitution in 1789, nobody knew if the country would last.
2. Just as America was getting started, the *French Revolution* began, and America struggled not to get involved in the wars between France and the rest of Europe.
3. One positive result for America was that the third president, Thomas Jefferson, was able to convince France to sell the Louisiana territory to America. The *Louisiana Purchase* doubled the territory of the United States.
4. America had to fight Britain again in the *War of 1812*, because Britain was kidnapping America sailors to serve in the British navy against France.
5. By the end of the war, Americans felt that they had truly achieved independence. The “Era of Good Feelings” was the name given to the period, with the country united in a sense of achievement and hope.