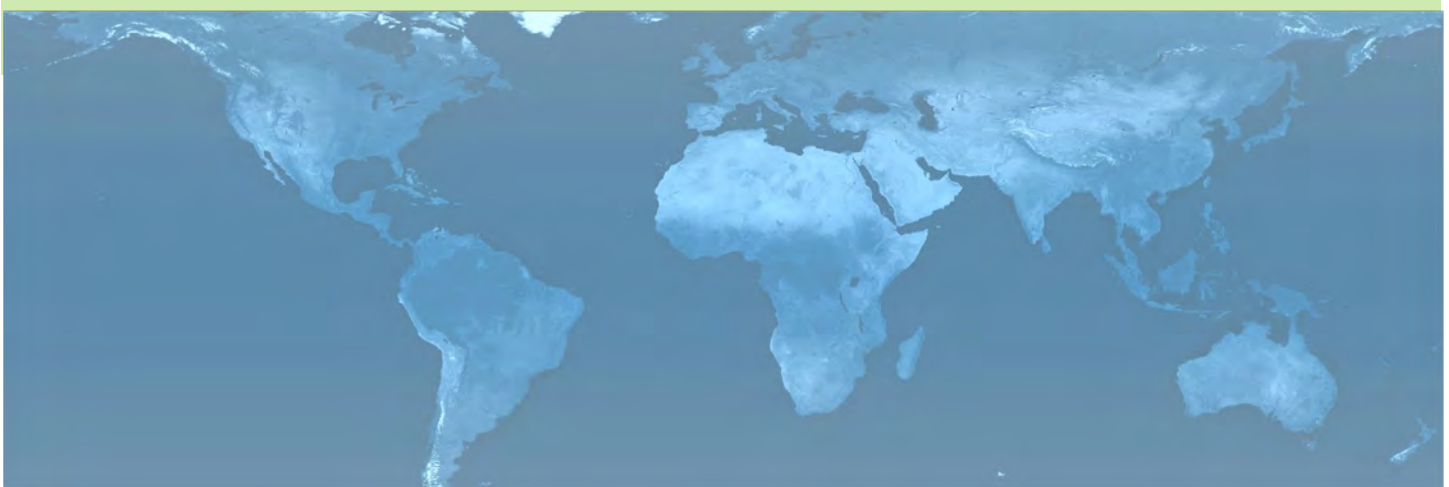


The Big Picture

Our Story From a Bird's Eye View



Historic Indian Agency House
at Fort Winnebago

The Big Picture

Our Story From a Bird's Eye View



Historic Indian Agency House *at Fort Winnebago*



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About This Learning Guide

The theme for the 2026 season at the Historic Indian Agency House is **The Big Picture**. This learning guide was developed to provide a broad understanding of our historic site’s place in big-story context. It is not meant to be a comprehensive world history survey. Rather, it provides an overall view from a mile high so we can see the sweeping panorama. It is a valuable perspective that we often don’t pursue or explore — one that helps us pull together insights that might otherwise be lost on us when we examine the particulars of isolated historical subjects from the ground, so to speak.

Age Range: Middle School through Adult

The information and activities in this guide are intended to provide observations of this historical vista while also offering some featured highlights which help us drive in “survey stakes” here and there for orientation. The intent is to provide a springboard for learning that inspires us to branch out in our own chosen directions to continue our exploration of history from this captivating distance.

Further Learning Icons:



Places to visit



Videos to watch



Books to Read



Activities to do



Web content to explore

Additional free learning guides and educational resources may be found on our website:
www.agencyhouse.org/learn

I

Introduction: The Big Picture

Our Story From a Bird's Eye View

Have you ever climbed to the top of a high hill or flown in an airplane? From up there, you can see a wide, sweeping landscape all at one time, similar to what a bird sees during flight. It's a magnificent point of view! From that high perspective, you can't distinguish details like you could if you were standing on the ground. Instead, you get the big picture. You can understand how various parts interconnect with one another to form the whole scene.

Often, we learn about history in isolated chunks and focus on lots of details. That's great, but sometimes we miss the big picture. Realizing how all those stories fit together can be a fascinating, exciting, and even surprising adventure!

Let's get a bird's eye view of the important story that happened here at the Fort Winnebago Indian Agency. How does what happened here in 1832 fit into the **much bigger** story? Come along with us. Let's fly!



1

In the Beginning

“You have to know the past to understand the present.”¹

How Do We Know?

“Let’s start at the very beginning. A very good place to start,” as the well-known song suggests.²

No one alive today was there when King Tutankhamun ruled Egypt; or when Genghis Khan’s troops flooded over Asia; or when Harriet Tubman led enslaved people to freedom. None of us ever met a Caesar of the Roman Empire or watched the Mayans invent their spectacular calendar. ...and of course none of us was around to witness firsthand how everything came to be in the beginning.

To understand the past, we must rely on information handed down by those who came before us. Insights may come, for example, from a written document, a piece of art, or an oral story repeated over generations. Archaeological evidence can give us clues to the past, too. But just as we need to be cautious of skewed information such as inaccurate social media posts, and photoshopped pictures of our day, we need to carefully evaluate historical sources, too. It’s not always easy to know if information is credible, reliable, unbiased, and accurate. We must be good listeners, eager learners, perceptive explorers, thorough investigators, and careful thinkers as we practice discernment.

With all that said, we can be so grateful that people have preserved pieces and parts of history for us! Knowing the stories of the past does, indeed, help us to understand the present time in which we live.

¹Astronomer Carl Sagan, “Cosmos”; ²“Do-Re-Mi” from *The Sound of Music*



How Do We Remember?

How do we remember? How can we know what happened in the past? By what means has history been preserved and passed down to us? How do we analyze sources? How can archaeology help us reconstruct some aspects of history for which there is no written record? Explore answers to these questions in depth:



www.agencyhouse.org/remembering



AT A GLANCE:

Origins ●

Indigenous Peoples – The Earliest Inhabitants of a Place

The first people group to live in a particular area is said to be **Indigenous** to that place. These earliest inhabitants of a place may also be called Native peoples or First Nations. In contrast, people who move into an area already occupied by another group may be considered immigrants, settlers, colonists, foreigners, aliens, refugees, exiles, expatriates, invaders, or conquerors, depending upon the context.



This Ain't Your (Great, Great, Great...) Granny's World!

The world of the earliest people was a far different place than it is today. Even in our own lifespans, the earth is ever changing. Ecosystems go through a process of succession. Places that were once prairies may now be forests. Landscapes erode. Coastlines shrink. Islands form and disappear. Rivers change courses. Volcanoes erupt. Earthquakes, wildfires, hurricanes, tornados, mudslides, floods, droughts, and tsunamis all have their transforming effects. Earth's geology displays change everywhere, from the sudden-and-violent to the slow-and-gradual; from the massive-and-widespread to the local-and-limited. People, too, interact with and change the landscape. We build houses, roads, bridges, dams, and cities. Wars, farming, mining, and manufacturing all affect our physical environment.

There is evidence that initially there was one supercontinent called Pangaea which split into separate continents on tectonic plates that continue to drift today. In the fossil record, too, we find profound changes from the early days. An incredible variety of plants and animals have gone extinct or no longer reside in places they once did. The passenger pigeons, dinosaurs, and cave bears that roamed the earth alongside our ancestors are now gone. Three-toed horses, barrel-bodied rhinos, sabre-toothed deer, camels, and giant tortoises once lived in Nebraska? Yep. Mammoths grazed in Kenosha, Wisconsin? Affirmative. Vast glacial ice has advanced and retreated. Fossils of tropical flora and fauna are found in Canada. Evidence of "ancient seas" exists worldwide. Fossils of sea creatures are found in the Sahara desert and at the top of Mt. Everest. Yes, the earth has undergone much change and continues to be shaped and re-shaped by the powerful forces of nature.

At the Fox-Wisconsin Portage

Long ago, much of WI was covered by glaciers. The Fox-Wisconsin portage was at the far edge of a massive ice sheet. Wild! When the rocky ice melted, it left behind special land features. Ho-Chunk oral stories mention this icy era. There is glacial evidence on parts of every continent!

Around the World

Indigenous is used as a general term. In Australia, for instance, there are many distinct Indigenous people groups, each with its own unique traditional language and customs. Words like *koala*, *wombat*, and *boomerang* came from Australian indigenous languages.

Explore & Discover

Origin Stories

Indigenous peoples have passed down a wide variety of **origin stories** – stories that aim to explain how everything came into existence.

The Basare people live in the African nation of Ghana. Their origin story says that God first created heaven, supported with pillars. Then he made the world in the form of lightning, and from this the moon and sun were made. The moon and sun fought, and the sun pushed the moon into the mud. Next, he created clouds and a red rooster that crows every time it thunders. Rain and a male and female rainbow were created next, followed by the creation of two assistants to whom he gave the earth as a place for them to work. All this happened before mountains, valleys, rivers, and lakes came to be. Finally, he created human beings and animals.³



A Slavic origin story says that the world's creator, Rod, was hatched from a golden egg nestled in darkness. When the eggshell cracked, love and light spilled out. He separated light from darkness, good from evil, and put the earth between the heavens and the oceans. The earth and outer space and everything in them was made from parts of his body, so he exists within what was made. A host of other gods were made to oversee everything. A “world tree” was planted with roots in the underworld, a trunk which runs through the earth, and a crown supporting the sky.⁴

³“On the Concept of Creation in African Ontology,” Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu & Ejikemeuwa J.O. Ndubis; ⁴“Slavic Myth of Creation: Rod,” Erna Gröic



Native American Origin Stories



Watch PBS videos about origin stories from various Native people groups in the Americas in their own words:

<https://wisconsin.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/native-america/t/sacred-origin-stories/>

A Mesopotamian Origin Story

Many origin stories throughout the world contain parts of the creation story passed down through the descendants of a man named Shem, who was one of the earliest inhabitants of Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq/Syria). This creation story is recorded in the ancient Hebrew book, *Berashaeth* (meaning genesis, the beginning).

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Over the course of six days, God spoke, commanding all of creation into existence by His mighty power. He formed the first man, Adam, from the dust of the ground and breathed life into him. He fashioned the first woman, Eve, out of a rib he removed from Adam. Adam and Eve were the ancestors of all people on earth. God placed them in a special garden called Eden, where they soon rebelled against him. They were banished from Eden and all of creation came under a curse, but God made a promise to one day fix the mess they had made by sending a savior into the world.

Over time, the population became so wicked that God destroyed the earth with a worldwide flood. It was a catastrophic seismic event in which the fountains of the great deep far below the earth's surface burst forth, explosively cleaving the land apart. At the same time, a torrent of water was let loose from the heavens, pouring down on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights. The entire earth was covered with water to a depth of over 20 feet above the highest mountains, burying living creatures in flood sediments (fossils). God saved only eight people – Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives – on a special boat, along with two of each kind of air-breathing, land-dwelling animal (and seven of some).

Mountains rose up and valleys sank down as earth's topography was dramatically altered. After about a year, the

waters receded enough that the survivors could come off the boat and start over repopulating the earth. It was a very different place than they had known before. They had to survive in these new and difficult conditions with the materials and resources at hand, along with whatever knowledge and skills they had carried with them through the flood. The animals had to adapt, too.



Noah's family moved to the plains of Shinar in Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. There, his descendants rebelled against God again at a city they built for themselves (Babel). They had constructed a tower to boast of their own greatness and had refused to obey God's command to fill the earth. God judged them again – this time by confusing their language. No longer able to understand one another, they began to spread out over the face of the earth. As family groups with their own languages moved to various parts of the globe, their cultural traditions inherently became distinctive over generations. Chapter 10 of the story describes where Noah's descendants settled early on, becoming the Indigenous inhabitants of locations around the world. It is thought by some that an ice age came soon after the global flood due to the drastic changes in atmospheric and oceanic conditions. People groups may have traveled across land bridges or ice bridges to places like the Americas and Australia. Many Indigenous groups also had shipbuilding expertise, allowing them to travel great distances over the waters.

Things to Do, Places to Go, Topics to Investigate!

Delve into geology, paleontology, & archaeology. Explore Indigenous cultures. Investigate origin stories.



Kenosha Public Museum, Kenosha, WI | Burpee Museum, Rockford, IL | Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, Collinsville, IL | Aztalan State Park, Jefferson, WI and Hoard Historical Museum's "Mystery of the Mounds" exhibit, Fort Atkinson, WI | Effigy Mounds National Monument, Harpers Ferry, IA | Cave of the Mounds, Blue Mounds, WI | Compare Kettle Moraine State Forest with the driftless area in WI | Ashfall Fossil Beds, Royal, NE | Creation Museum or Ark Encounter, KY | ICR Discovery Center, Dallas, TX | Oneida Nation Museum, DePere, WI, and various other Tribal museums



Effigy Mounds National Monument



Participate in a real archaeology dig at the Historic Indian Agency House www.agencyhouse.org/archaeology | Collect your own Devonian fossils at Fossil and Prairie Park Preserve, Rockford, IA, or Fossil Park, Sylvania, OH | Collect your own Ordovician fossils at Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester, MN or Trammel Fossil Park, Sharonville, OH



Watch glaciers advance & retreat in WI https://youtu.be/rq90Qv0-tbo?si=n_4D_K5RvDWwPnps | Australian Indigenous performance https://youtu.be/OhyKsEn6_So?si=X9ZOwFFjBzPCETb8 | "Archaeology Kids' Camp" videos & at-home activities www.agencyhouse.org/archaeology-kids-camp | Find documentaries on Grand Canyon, vol-canoes, & other geological wonders



Search for the origin stories of Indigenous people groups all around the world | Tri-county geology www.wgnhs.wisc.edu/pubshare/B114.pdf | Explore the historic landscape in-depth and hands-on www.agencyhouse.org/landscape

Timeline

Keep the **big picture** in mind by reviewing the timeline at the bottom of the pages each time you start a new chapter.



2

Early Societies & Empires

“Panta rhei.”¹ Everything flows.

“There is nothing permanent except change.”¹

Let’s circle the globe to take a look at what’s happening now that the earliest people groups are getting established in their lands. Buckle up as we time-lapse at warp speed through thousands of years of big-picture history.

Someone once described world history this way: “Men come and go, cities rise and fall, whole civilizations appear and disappear – the earth remains, slightly modified.”² If we were to view history from above, so to speak, we would see continuous movement and ever-changing patterns all over the face of the earth as people groups mixed and mingled; traveled and traded; warred and made alliances; intermarried; and influenced one another with their cultural customs, philosophies, and ways of life. Boundaries of nations would look fluid, not fixed in place. Nothing would stay the same for very long. We would see a vibrant spectacle of constant motion and transformation. Societies change. Languages morph. National identities shift. Genetic traits merge. Tribal territories blend into nations and even into spectacularly huge empires...all of which expand, shrink and even collapse over time. Powerful empires are wiped off the face of the map, while obscure people groups rise to prominence. Technological innovations accelerate the mobility of people and facilitate the exchange of goods and ideas. Ebbing and flowing. Shifting and changing. That is the history of humankind. And that is still our story today.



¹Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus; ²Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*

Society: A Common Sense of Community

A **society** is a people group in a particular area that functions together under a governing system with particular norms, standards, and rules. It doesn’t mean that each individual or family within the society is the same. There are people of different racial, ethnic, tribal, religious, cultural, or linguistic (language) backgrounds who often live together within the same society. Not everyone within a society shares the same values, morals, opinions, traditions, ideals, beliefs, and goals. A society might be a nation or a kingdom. It might be several nations or city-states bound together in some way. It might be as large as an empire or as tiny as a village. “Society” is a general term that may be applied to people groups that function as a unit. Societies can be established by choice, or they can be formed by force through domination or military conquest.



AT A GLANCE:

Origins ● Early Societies & Empires ●

How the Story Unfolded in the Eastern Hemisphere

Mesopotamia – the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern-day Iraq and Syria – is also known as the **Cradle of Civilization**. Why? Because the earliest cities, such as Eridu and Uruk, developed there thousands of years ago. They had organized government and labor systems, engineering expertise, distinctive architecture, arts, science, literature, and a highly-developed writing system known as **cuneiform**. The Code of King Hammurabi is one of the most ancient and comprehensive written legal codes, and it came out of Mesopotamia.



Did you know that the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a long story composed in poetic form, was written in Mesopotamia around 4,000 years ago and that you can still pick up a copy and read it today?

As time went on, people groups developed highly-organized societies further away from Mesopotamia. The ancient Egyptians had a powerful and opulent monarchy by the Nile River in northeastern Africa, as did the Nubians (Kushites) just to their south. The mighty Hittites in modern-day Turkey were masters of iron weapons and chariots. In the Levant (modern-day Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and Jordan), the Canaanite cultures developed urban centers and extensive trade networks. More than 1,000 cities were part of the Indus Valley Civilization (in modern-day Pakistan and northwestern India) where leaders planned precision grid networks for their brick-paved roads and elaborate drainage systems. Ancient Chinese dynasties, such as the Shang and Zhou, cultivated exquisite cultural arts and philosophical schools of thought. The Hebrews originated from Ur in Mesopotamia, lived as nomads in the land of Canaan, spent 400 years as slaves in Egypt, and went on to become a formidable and wealthy kingdom with a magnificent temple. The Minoans of Crete, the Oxus people of Turkmenistan, the Sabaeans of Yemen, and countless other cultures established ancient civilizations all over the Eastern hemisphere.



Object #P0003
Spurlock Museum



Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures (ISAC)



Spurlock Museum
Object #1913.09.0005B-E, G

“Civilization”

A “civilization” is a society which is large and layered in complexity. Unfortunately, in the past, the term “uncivilized” was commonly used to label some people groups as being worth less than others which, of course, is not true!

At the Fox-Wisconsin Portage

“We have always been here.” The Hoocąk (Ho-Chunk) and Kiash Matchitwuk (Menominee) are the descendants of Indigenous peoples who lived at this “carrying place” between the Fox & Wisconsin rivers. Learn more on page 9.

Around the World



Watch nations and empires rise & fall on a map in lightning fast time-lapse from early days through modern times. It’s incredible to see! <https://youtu.be/bs03z0Lsu9g?si=DmEOoBm5u8TjUPoB>

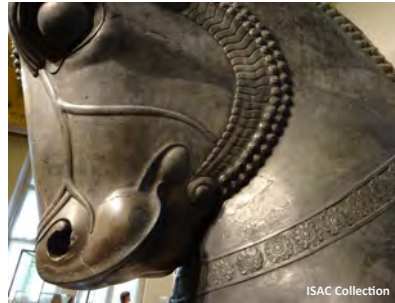
Explore & Discover

Soon, **empires** begin to explode onto the scene as powerful people groups conquered and controlled huge swathes of surrounding peoples and territories. The first major empires – the Akkadian and Assyrian empires – originated in Mesopotamia. The Egyptians, Babylonians, and Hittites subsequently built extensive ancient empires in the region. The Persians (from modern-day Iran) took empire-building to a whole new level, becoming the first recorded superpower ruling over a vast expanse that covered parts of three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe). Alexander the Great's Macedonian (Greek) empire arose after that and then split into four smaller empires. Several more empires rose and fell in ancient times, including the Xiongnu, Parthian, Mauryan, and Roman. In this age of empires, Christianity emerged and spread from the region of Israel outward.



During the Middle Ages (roughly the 400s to 1500), other empires gained traction, including the Byzantine and Ghana empires; the Arab-Islamic Empire; and the Khmer, Mongol, and Ottoman empires. Islam was established during this time, and major clashes with European Christianity ensued. Religion was regularly weaponized into a tool of coercion and conquest through centuries of Inquisitions, Jihads, and Crusades. (Enter: knights in shining armor.) Fuel was added to the flame that ultimately ignited the Protestant Reformation. While religions clashed violently in some regions, they co-existed peacefully in others, such as the Mongol Empire during the Khan Dynasty. A rigid **Feudal** system with its strict hierarchy of kings, lords, vassals, and peasants took strong root in Europe during these **Medieval** times. However, the bubonic plague greatly contributed to the eventual decline of Feudalism as this “Black Death” pandemic devastated Asia, Europe, and northern Africa, killing 30-60% of Europe’s population alone. It threw the whole region into social and economic chaos, inciting peasant revolts against the upper classes. All of this set the stage for what was about to burst forth on a global scale. (Find out about it in chapter 3.)

No Need to Travel Around the World to Explore World Cultures Firsthand!



All the photos in this chapter were taken at museums right here in the Midwestern USA. Some are real artifacts and some are exact reproductions.



Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, University of Chicago | Spurlock Museum of World Cultures, University of IL at Urbana-Champaign | Milwaukee Public Museum, WI | Museum of World Treasures, Wichita, KS | Michael C. Carlos Museum, Emory University, Atlanta, GA | Biblical History Center, La Grange, GA



Inca Empire <https://youtu.be/qKjDnt7vHMw?si=b9fBw-4FFLdBnj1L> and <https://youtu.be/5cVSWA37xiI?si=hUST47C-PeqxaMW2> | Mayas <https://youtu.be/iaKofHyZ00c?si=O4zlUUKAlx6sx18t> | Rapa Nui https://youtu.be/OhEeh_BcADg?si=AcvM7C645Kon5SDI | Tupi people https://youtu.be/314XlCmbI3M?si=ICzRcuCwTp_rWdq | Native Americans <https://youtu.be/NErXRVfm1uU?si=IeTZJn7DNL3eoQx2>



Gain special insights into world cultures through their creative arts www.agencyhouse.org/arts

AT A GLANCE:

Origins ● Early Societies & Empires ●

Flying Over the Americas

While societies grew and declined, moved and morphed, invaded and surrendered on the continents of the Eastern hemisphere, the same process was happening in North and South America with different people groups and alliances – Inca to Inuit, Haudenosaunee to Anishinaabe, Cherokee to Ojibwe, and countless other tribes, nations, confederacies, and empires.

Much of what we know about ancient history in the Americas comes from archaeology, Native oral stories, and records like **petroglyphs or pictographs** (rock carvings or paintings). Very few of these people groups chose to use a written language as we would think of it today. The ones who did mainly lived in **Mesoamerica** (Central America), such as the Mayas, Aztecs, Mixtecs, and Zapotecs. Ancient Mexican people created complex pictographic books on long sheets of bark paper called **amate** which were folded accordion-style. We may not have lots of written records from ancient times in the Americas, but it's not because the people didn't have a rich and totally fascinating story! It just requires detective work to piece the clues together, and it's well worth the effort. There's much to be discovered!



Explore an interactive globe online to see the locations and names of many of the Native peoples of the Americas, Australia, Africa, the Arctic circle, and the Pacific islands at www.native-land.ca.

Hoočąk and Kiash Matchitiwuk peoples in focus

Just as with everywhere else, societies developed, changed, and interacted with one another in the region that would one day become Wisconsin. Archaeologists use the terms Paleo, Archaic, Woodland, Mississippian, and Oneota to describe eras of changing cultural characteristics in Wisconsin's earliest societies. The Indigenous peoples of the Fox-Wisconsin portage trace their roots through this tapestry of change.

Villages of Hoočąk (Ho-Chunk) and Kiash Matchitiwuk (Menominee) people were historically situated here on the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers, and their lands extended out over millions of acres surrounding this crossroads. Ho-Chunk oral stories speak of their Nation originating at Móogašuc (Red Banks) near Green Bay. Their ancestors are believed to have created earthen mounds during the archaic and woodland eras. Their burial mounds and effigy mounds shaped like animals are most-concentrated in southern Wisconsin, southeast Minnesota, northeast Iowa, and northern Illinois where they've lived for generations.

Menominee oral stories trace their origin to the mouth of the Menominee River near Green Bay, with their historic core extending through parts of Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Their historic footprint spread out to a much larger region which was shared with numerous other people groups such as Ho-Chunks.

Ho-Chunk oral histories speak of changes in their tribe's population over time, such as eras when villages' populations numbered in the thousands to times when warfare with a surrounding tribal **confederation** (separate people groups allied together for a common purpose) almost wiped them out. Groups of Ho-Chunks also separated from the main tribe and established their own societies elsewhere, becoming independent nations such as the Iowa and Ojibwe.



PBS Wisconsin: Ho-Chunk and Menominee tribal elders tell their oral histories: <https://www.pbs.org/show/tribal-histories/>



Shane Yellow Thunder, Ho-Chunk Language Division - History & Culture <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbIGVWzLEZg>



Menominee Tribal History Guide <https://limpreur.info/history/Wisconsin%20History/Menominee%20Tribal%20History%20Guide.pdf>



Early Cultures of Wisconsin: Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center website + museum in La Crosse www.uwlax.edu/mvac/pre-european-people/

3

Hemispheres Collide

“Exploration is really the essence of the human spirit.”¹

There’s Something Big On the Horizon

Up until now, the drama of history was unfolding largely on a local, regional, continental, or hemispheric basis. But winds of change began to blow. Something extraordinary was about to colossally shift the dynamics of people groups on a global scale. That is, the cultures of the Eastern hemisphere would soon come into contact with the cultures of the Western hemisphere...and that was a whole new ballgame with far-reaching implications.

Following the Silk Road to...the Americas?

“In fourteen hundred ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.”² Yeah, okay, but why did he go? And why was it such a big deal? What was going on in the big picture that caused people like Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama and Ferdinand Magellan to go on dangerous and dubious ocean expeditions? Let’s start by doing some quick aerial surveillance over the continents at this time in history.

In Africa, the Mali, Songhai, and Zulu empires rose to power, while an enormous part of northern Eurasia was seized by the Rus people to form the Russian Empire. Modern-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and parts of Afghanistan came under the rule of the Mughal Empire, while the Srivijaya and Majapahit empires controlled the Indonesian islands. In the Western hemisphere, too, empires took shape, such as the massive Inca and smaller Aztec empires in South America, as well as the North American Cahokia, Iroquois Confederacy, Illinois Confederacy, and Wabanaki Confederacy. Re-

¹Apollo 8 astronaut Frank Borman; ²“In 1492” poem, original author unknown



...But Contact Started Earlier

The Norse were a cultural group in Scandinavia. During Medieval times, a society of Norse known as Vikings emerged who were prominent seafarers, shipbuilders, navigators, traders, raiders, explorers, and colonizers. They used special longboats that were shallow and fast which could be rowed or sailed. Some featured carved dragon heads.

Viking Leif Erikson interacted with Indigenous people on the shores of what is now Canada around the year 1000 – almost 500 years before Columbus happened upon the Americas. Erikson called the land “Vinland” (modern-day Newfoundland and Labrador). Archaeology has confirmed the presence of a Viking settlement, L’Anse aux Meadows, in Newfoundland.



Norsemen wrote about these voyages over 700 yrs ago. We can still read their tales today! *The Vinland Sagas*, Penguin Classics, 2008.



Object #1997.12.0005A, The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

AT A GLANCE:

Origins ● Early Societies & Empires ● Hemispheres Collide ●

markably, Australia didn't have any empires. Instead, its Indigenous tribes largely maintained their diversity and autonomy right up until contact with Europeans.

Now let's swoop down and do a flyover of Europe and China to see what laid the groundwork for the voyages to the Americas. We'll start by checking out the **Silk Road** which came into being during the Han Dynasty of China around 130 B.C. and lasted for over 1,500 years! <whistle> It wasn't a paved road. It was just a route of paths and trails over harsh terrain by which caravans of people, camels, and horses traveled. ...and it wasn't just one route, but a network of them. ...and parts of it weren't even on land, but over water. ...and of course the road wasn't made of silk, but Chinese silk was one of the many sought-after exotic trade goods that merchants carried to Europe along these routes. The Silk Road traversed through all sorts of territories and empires, playing a crucial role in **intercontinental** travel and trade for a very, very long time.

Did you know that the Silk Road even changed how warfare was waged? The Chinese had invented gunpowder around the 9th century, and by the end of the 14th century, cannons were being widely used by Europeans. It was gunpowder that greatly influenced the outcome of the Hundred Years' War fought between Britain and France...and gunpowder would soon undergird European conquests in the Americas, too.

Then in 1453, the Ottoman Empire essentially shut down the Silk Road by imposing huge taxes and restrictions on goods being transported through their vast territory. The demand for international goods could no longer be easily satisfied. So, the Portuguese started dabbling in efforts to bypass the Ottomans by sailing around the southern tip of Africa directly to India for trade. Spain tried a different tactic. The king and queen of Spain sponsored Christopher Columbus's radical and risky mission to sail west on the ocean and (hopefully) end up on the eastern shores of China and India. On the trip, Columbus would use yet another Chinese invention acquired from the Silk Road – a magnetic compass – for more accurate and reliable navigation rather than solely relying on the stars for direction. Well, the Europeans knew nothing about the giant land mass (North and South America) that was in the way, so when Columbus landed in the Bahamas near modern-day Florida, he truly thought he had reached the East Indies off the coast of Asia. That's why he called the people he encountered "Indians." Eventually, the Europeans figured out what had happened, and then a great race was on to explore what this **New World** had to offer, which of course was only "new" to them – not to the Indigenous people who had already inhabited the Americas for many centuries.



The Great Wall of China

The Great Wall of China was built over a span of about 2,000 years to help defend against invaders. Most of it was constructed in the 14th to 17th centuries. It's 13,171 miles long!

At the Fox-Wisconsin Portage

The Fox-Wisconsin portage was a critical hub in the French and British fur trade. The rivers functioned as superhighways from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi watershed and across the Atlantic Ocean. Furs were wildly popular in European fashions in the 17th-19th centuries.

Around the World

Slavery existed in various forms worldwide since ancient times, but Europeans in the 15th-19th centuries created a whole industry out of trading enslaved Africans to the Americas & Caribbean in exchange for goods like sugar, tobacco, and cotton. It made those nations vastly wealthy.

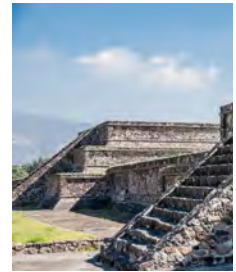
Explore & Discover

Empire-Building on a Global Scale

As early as the 1400s, the European nation of Portugal was the first to begin establishing an **overseas** empire – not just on a regional, continental, or hemispheric basis, but on a global scale – as they sought valuable resources, new trading partners, wealth, and power. They first explored and **colonized** parts of Africa, meaning they sent Portuguese people there to settle (live permanently) and take control of the land and its inhabitants. Then they branched out to South America, India, and Southeast Asia. If you’ve ever wondered why Portuguese is the official language of far-flung places like Brazil and Angola, now you know. Spain quickly got in on the act and far surpassed Portugal in the size of its empire. France and the Netherlands had colonial empires, too. However, Britain surpassed them all. At its peak, tiny little Britain ruled over roughly 1/4 of the world’s population and claimed around 1/4 of the world’s land mass as its own! Because the British government had snarfed up such a vast empire, it used to be said that “the sun never sets on the British empire.” That is, Britain controlled territory in every time zone across the globe, so it was always daylight somewhere in their domain.



Although the extent was far greater than ever before – involving land areas in both the **Old World** (eastern hemisphere) and **New World** (western hemisphere) – the processes were pretty much the same as always when people groups came into contact with one another. Each **culture** had its own experiences and ways of understanding the world, its own customs, traditions, and day-to-day ways of life. So just as with everywhere all throughout history, when different people groups with their unique cultural characteristics engaged with one another, they sometimes mixed, mingled and married; sometimes coexisted, collaborated, and consolidated; sometimes bristled, brawled, and battled. It was nothing new during these centuries of colonialism. Just...a whole lot bigger.



It was during this era that colonists also wreaked havoc on the Indigenous status quo of Australia. The Dutch were the first Europeans to map out Australia, but the British were the first to settle in it by establishing a **penal colony** where they sent 160,000 convicted criminals and political prisoners to live, followed by an influx of free settlers. During a series of Australian gold rushes in the mid-19th century, immigrants from all over the globe descended on and overran the continent, permanently altering the cultural, political, and environmental dynamics. The Russian and Qing empires also greatly expanded their territories during this time, spreading out like amoebas, engulfing massive expanses of Asia and parts of Eastern Europe and claiming them as their own. Russia also claimed some overseas territories, including what is now Alaska and the Aleutian Islands plus a settlement in California.

Intriguing Stuff to See, Do, and Learn



Read Marco Polo’s fascinating book about his purported adventures as a young Italian man who traveled the silk road & worked for Chinese Emperor Kublai Khan: *Marco Polo: The Travels*, Penguin



Spanish colonization of the Americas <https://youtu.be/tlx5AbbeEqI?si=HOWviMMH4KZWg0RH>

French & British fur trade in Wisconsin <https://youtu.be/Czf1GvFeics?si=s1fRV5mgo4dUUEux>

Watch the movie *Amazing Grace* (rated PG) to learn about the fight to end the British slave trade.



Milton House Museum, Milton, WI – a certified stop on the underground railroad

Charters of Freedom outdoor exhibit, Riverside Park, Portage, WI (U.S. Decl. of Independence & more)



Attend semiquincentennial events or a Revolutionary War reenactment

AT A GLANCE:

Origins ● Early Societies & Empires ● Hemispheres Collide ●

Challenging the Norms

Before the New World was re-“discovered,” explored, and colonized, there was another kind of “new world” atmosphere already brewing in Europe – not in terms of empires, but in reference to new ways of thinking and viewing the world. It started in the 1300s with a retro fad in Italy. It was called the **Renaissance**. During the Renaissance, the art, literature, philosophy, legal and political ideas, and architecture of ancient Greece and Rome again became tremendously popular and influential. The invention of the printing press in the 1400s made Renaissance thinking spread like wildfire. In fact, the printing press would end up profoundly affecting society. Why was it such a radical invention? Because printed materials were, for the first time ever, able to be widely distributed to the common people, not just to the wealthy or religious elite. Ideas and information could now be easily and extensively shared. This created quite a buzz! It was huge! It made people question traditional authority and customary ways of doing things. It encouraged people to think for themselves, nurture curiosity, search for answers, and maximize their individual human potential. The Bible became available to everyday people in their own languages, acting as a catalyst for the Protestant Reformation. Education came to be considered crucial to personal and societal improvement. Science was burgeoning, leading to incredible discoveries that turned many previous assumptions on their ear. A rigorous and systematic scientific method was developed. Groundwork was laid for major social and political shifts which would come later, such as those generated by the Peace of Westphalia following the Thirty Years’ War and the “Glorious Revolution” in England.



The Renaissance also paved the way for the **Enlightenment**, which challenged social norms on a grand scale. Enlightenment thinkers rejected tradition and anything they viewed as “superstition,” and instead promoted human reason as the best means by which to understand the world. Societal structure was re-imagined with a growing emphasis on individual rights and freedoms. Democracies and parliamentary systems – complete with the idea of voting rights rooted in ancient Greek culture – emerged and spread. Enlightenment philosophies even reached the European colonists in America and inspired them to rebel against British rule. It is ironic that the philosophies which had spurred Britain’s own “Glorious Revolution” also motivated the colonists to revolt against them.

In 1775, the colonists found themselves in a war of revolution against Britain, and on July 4, 1776, an official Declaration of Independence was signed. The United States of America was born, but the war waged on for several more years. It should be no surprise that the United States’ governmental system has strong ancient Greco-Roman cultural influences at its core since those were the popular political ideas floating around at that time. The success of the American Revolution inspired France to attempt a revolution of its own against its king, as well. This different way of thinking about individual rights and equality of at least some social classes was re-shaping Europe and other parts of the world in a big way. The USA was a new kid on the block at this time, but it would eventually emerge as yet another superpower on the world stage, exerting its own influence politically, economically, militarily, and culturally around the world.



250th Anniversary of the USA

This year (July 4, 2026) marks the USA’s **semiquincentennial** of declared independence from British rule. “Semi”=half. “Quin”= 5. “Centennial”=100. ...so half of 500 = **250 years**. A war victory by the Americans (1783) formally sealed the deal in Britain’s eyes.



4

Our Story in National Context

“I do not believe there is a man, white or red that can say he owns the world”¹

Hemispheres Collide ...Right Here

Let's trade our supersonic jet for a helicopter so we can hover for a bit over this new nation called the United States of America. What exactly happened when explorers, traders, and settlers from across the ocean stepped into the story of America? What role did the Indian agency house at Fort Winnebago play in the wholesale transformation of America from Indigenous-governed homelands to something so drastically different?

In 1832, an Indian agency house — a special meeting place — was constructed at the ancient portaging trail between the Fox and Wisconsin rivers. It is a unique reminder of this weighty period of the past. Powerful stories are embodied within its hand-hewn timbers. It was a time of intense political debate, social change, conflict, and uncertainty as long-mounting tensions came to a head. Cultures collided here. Critical decisions were made here. Let's take a look...

¹“I do not believe there is a man, white or red that can say he owns the world – It was our Great Maker that made it and he alone is the Master of it.” Waukon Decorah, Portage 1836

Duking it Out Over There & Here

France and England historically despised one another (remember that Hundred Years' War?), and that animosity carried right over into colonial America.

In what is now the USA, Spain colonized parts of Florida and a good chunk of the Southwest. France claimed a vast area from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. Britain formed 13 colonies on the East Coast.

Well, Britain and France continued to skirmish in Europe in the Nine Years' War, which spilled over to their American territories. (Here it was called King William's War.) Each side had its own Native American allies in these battles. ...same story with Queen Anne's War and King George's War which followed. But the Seven Years' War – of which the **French and Indian War** in America played a part – left a big and lasting mark. Britain trounced France and acquired France's North American territorial claims east of the Mississippi River, plus Canada.



AT A GLANCE:

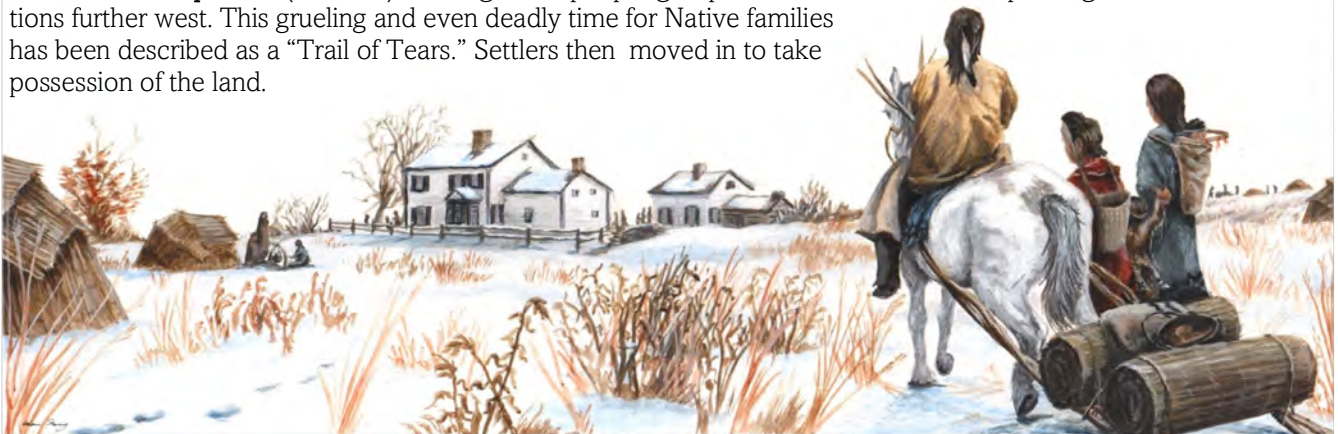
Origins ● Early Societies & Empires ● Hemispheres Collide ●

Colonization in Native Wisconsin

Let's back up a moment. How did all these colonizers from the Old World lay claim to lands in the New World? Didn't the Native tribes own the land? How did the land transfer from Indigenous ownership to European (and later American) ownership? The answer is complex. Native Americans tended to view land a bit differently than Europeans, seeing it as something that wasn't owned by anyone, per say, but used communally (although Native people did maintain and inhabit their own general territories, and warfare occurred between them over land and resources). Sometimes Europeans peacefully traded with, lived among, and intermarried with Indigenous populations, although peaceful coexistence was not typical. Sometimes European diseases such as smallpox, carried inadvertently by ships' passengers to the Americas, wiped out entire populations of Indigenous peoples, paving the way for Europeans to take their vacated land. Sometimes Native tribes sold land to European colonists. However, land was often confiscated through violence or coercion, as has sadly often been the case all around the world throughout history.

Another factor played a role in the frenzied European grab for territories overseas. In the 1400s, the Roman Catholic church, which wielded enormous political influence in the Old World, invented the Doctrine of Discovery, which stated that any "Christian" European king could discover and seize for themselves (forcibly, if necessary) any lands occupied by non-Christians. Empire-hungry kings now had what they considered to be the divine justification to do whatever was necessary to conquer the inhabitants of other lands. Armed conflict flowed from this philosophy: The Navajo Wars. Anglo-Powhatan Wars. Pequot War. Fox Wars. Anglo-Cherokee War. Pontiac's War. ...and countless other wars and smaller-scale conflicts fought on the soil of the Americas and elsewhere.

During the early 1800s, the new U.S. government implemented another system by which Native lands were acquired, involving government treaties and forced displacement. This is where the **Indian agency** at the Fox-Wisconsin portage enters the story. Indian agents acted as **ambassadors** (mediators) between Native tribes and the U.S. Government. With the passage of the **Indian Removal Act** in 1830, Indian agents also became involved in the **forced expulsion** (removal) of Indigenous people groups from their homelands, pushing them onto reservations further west. This grueling and even deadly time for Native families has been described as a "Trail of Tears." Settlers then moved in to take possession of the land.



At the Fox-Wisconsin Portage

Métis people were a distinct people group who emerged at the portage as a result of colliding cultures. The métis had a mixed Native American and Euro-American (often French) ancestry, creating a unique culture all their own.

Around the World

French people, too, were actually a mix of Indigenous Gaul plus Roman, Frank, Visigoth, Burgundian, Norse, & others who swept into France over the years. British were a mix of Indigenous Celtic Britons & Picts plus Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Frisians, Normans, & more.

Explore & Discover



The Hoocąk Story and Trail of Tears

Learn about the Fort Winnebago Indian Agency & its role in the Hoocąk (Ho-Chunk) people's trail of tears.



"On Location: The 1832 Landscape" video series www.agencyhouse.org/on-location

"On Location: The Ho-Chunk Treaty Trail" video series www.agencyhouse.org/treaty-trail



"The Historic Landscape" learning guide www.agencyhouse.org/landscape

"Trails: The Fox-Wisconsin Portage & Beyond" learning guide www.agencyhouse.org/trails-curriculum

"A Landscape of Families" interactive website <https://landscapeoffamilies.wixsite.com/discovering>

"Walking Wawa'ąjja" web content www.agencyhouse.org/walking

"Vintage Viewpoints" (heated debates on Indian Removal) www.agencyhouse.org/vintage-viewpoints



Visit the Historic Indian Agency House, Portage, WI www.agencyhouse.org/visit

Exhibits: "A Landscape of Families" & "Walking Wawa'ąjja" www.agencyhouse.org/exhibits



Citizens of a Stolen Land: A Ho-Chunk History..., Stephen Kantrowitz, Univ. of North Carolina Press

Putting It On the Timeline

The British and French were at it again in the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, and America got caught in their crossfire, leading to the War of 1812. In its wake, the USA expanded its influence westward across the continent [enter the Historic Indian Agency House]. Tribes across the entire United States went through parallel stories of forced displacement. Colonized territories increased in population and became states. Differing viewpoints on issues, particularly slavery, caused 11 southern states to **secede** (break away) from the USA, forming the Confederate States of America. This led to a civil war (1861-1865), which the northern states won. The nation was reunited under one government, slavery was eliminated, and the South was rebuilt from its ruins. Women campaigned for the right to vote, the Spanish-American War was fought, and the Panama Canal was constructed...

AT A GLANCE:

Origins ● Early Societies & Empires ● Hemispheres Collide ●

Who Claimed It All?



Pushes & Pulls: Immigrants Flood In

The USA is often called a **Melting Pot**, which is a container used to melt different metals together into one substance. That is, America is made up of people groups from all over the globe who have come together as one nation under common governance. But America is also like a patchwork quilt. **Immigrants** (people moving into a different country) tended to settle in groups with others from their home countries. Strong and diverse ethnic influences exist in “patches” all over America. The melting pot suggests cultural assimilation. The quilt analogy depicts distinct cultures stitched together. America is both.



There have been four major waves of immigration to the USA. The largest (1880-1920) involved 20 million people. But why did people come here? Pushes and pulls were different for everyone. Sometimes people were pulled to America by greater opportunities, personal land ownership, religious freedom, a new start in life, wealth, or adventure. Some were pushed to America by famine, war, disease, oppression, or poverty. People move for all sorts of reasons.

Digging Deeper: Engaging Ways to Explore Thought-Provoking Topics



Cherokee Trail of Tears <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZEUPIsJ4ek>

Animated map showing history of immigration <https://youtu.be/Fe79i1mu-mc?si=jHzUIsbMXXwuiNDh>



Tribal histories of Indigenous nations in Wisconsin <https://pbswisconsin.org/watch/tribal-histories/>

Learn about the culture and history of your personal ancestors (Indigenous? Immigrants? Both?)



Immigration <https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/immigration-to-the-United-States/631487>

Words of hope on Statue of Liberty's base www.statueofliberty.org/new-colossus/

Statue of Liberty www.statueofliberty.org/statue-of-liberty/overview-history/

“Artifact Ambassadors: An Online Exhibition” www.agencyhouse.org/artifact-ambassadors



Dear America book series, Scholastic www.goodreads.com/series/49549-dear-america

Wau-Bun: The “Early Day” in the Northwest, Juliette Kinzie www.agencyhouse.org/wau-bun

Native People of Wisconsin, Revised Edition (New Badger History), Patty Loew

The Making of Pioneer Wisconsin: Voices of Early Settlers, Michael E. Stevens



Visit Ethnic Heritage Sites: Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, Decorah, IA | National Czech & Slovak Museum, Cedar Rapids, IA | Swiss Historical Village, New Glarus, WI | German American Heritage Center, Davenport, IA | Old World Wisconsin, Eagle, WI | Ethnic Heritage Museum, Rockford, IL | African American Museum, Cedar Rapids, IA | Pella Historical Village & Windmill (Dutch), Pella, IA | Museum of Danish America, Elk Horn, IA | Center for French Colonial Life, Sainte Genevieve, MO | ...and lots more!

More to See: Mille Lacs Indian Museum (Ojibwe), Onamia, MN | Angel Decora Museum (Ho-Chunk), Winnebago, NE | Mesquaki Cultural Center/Museum, Tama, IA | Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park & On-a-Slant Mandan Village, Mandan, ND | Snake River Fur Post (Natives, French Voyageurs, British Fur Traders), Pine City, MN | Forts Folle Avoine (fur trade/Ojibwe), Danbury, WI | Apple River Fort (Blackhawk War), Elizabeth, IL | Fort Snelling, St. Paul, MN | Johnston Indian Agency, Piqua, OH | Colonial Williamsburg, VA

5

Globalization & Modern Times

“Technology is anything that wasn’t around when you were born.”¹

A Different Kind of Revolution That Totally Rocked the World

A **revolution** is “a sudden, radical, or complete change.”² The **Industrial Revolution**, unlike previous revolutions, was rooted in technological innovations which profoundly transformed, overhauled, or in some significant way impacted every corner of life all around the globe. Daily life became fundamentally different as the production and use of new material goods dominated the scene. Economies and societies were totally altered. This revolution, which started in Britain in the late 1700s, has taken place in stages, each one bringing about further leaps and bounds in technology. In fact, this revolution is still in progress today.

First, steam power and large-scale factory systems were developed. This led to an explosion in the mass production of goods. Reliance on railroads and steamships expanded. The steel and chemical industries took off, and electricity modernized the manufacturing scene. Automobiles were mass produced. Interchangeable parts became mainstream. Inventions skyrocketed. In the late 1900s, a third revolutionary surge happened: the **digital revolution**. Computers, microelectronics, the internet, and mobile communication came into being and turned everything upside-down again! “One of the most feared expressions in modern times is, “The computer is down.”³ Some contend that we’re in the beginning phases of a fourth Industrial Revolution with the rise of biotechnology, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence.

“In old times, life moved at a gentler rhythm, whereas modern times seem to demand constant speed and instant gratification.”⁴

“The advance of technology is based on making it fit in so that you don’t really even notice it, so it’s part of everyday life.”⁵

¹Computer scientist, Alan Kay; ²Merriam-Webster; ³Aerospace businessman Norman Augustine; ⁴Businesswoman Susan Shrestha; ⁵Bill Gates, Microsoft



AT A GLANCE:

Origins ● Early Societies & Empires ● Hemispheres Collide ●

It's a Small World After All

The great big world looks a whole lot smaller as we hitch a ride on a B52 bomber and view the modern scene. The industrial revolution came to equip a string of wars involving much of the world on various fronts: World War I, World War II, the Korean and Vietnam wars, the Persian Gulf War, and more. Now more than ever, nations relate with one another on a large scale in direct, complex ways. World economies, world cultural interactions, and worldwide exchanges of ideas among everyday people are the norm. World travel is commonplace. A worldwide pandemic also rapidly swept over the globe.

The traditional form of colonialism intensified in places like Africa, India, and Australia for a time but vastly declined in this chapter of history, as many newly-independent nations formed. The Russian Empire fell to a Communist takeover, leading to the rise of the powerful Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, but Russia remains a dominant world force. China also adopted Communism and has emerged as an economic world power. The Socio-political philosophies of Communism vs. Capitalism led to a **Cold War** (without military fighting), complete with nuclear threats, an arms (weapons) race, and a race to get into space and gain the upper hand there, too.

Formal world governing alliances developed, such as the United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, European Union, African Union, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, and more. The USA continues to be powerful and influential worldwide sometimes militarily and sometimes in a humanitarian sense. "The U.S. has intervened more often in more countries farther from its own shores than has any power in modern history."¹

"Though the mountains divide,
and the oceans are wide,
it's a small world after all."²

¹Author Stephen Kinzer; ²"It's a Small World," Sherman Brothers/Disney

At the Fox-Wisconsin Portage

Hocąk (Ho-Chunk) men were among the Indigenous American soldiers who employed their Native languages to serve as secret "Code Talkers" for the Allied forces during World War II.

<https://hocakworak.com/article.aspx?headline=Governor+Evers+signs+bill+designating+%E2%80%98Ho-Chunk+World+War+II+Code+Talkers+Memorial+Highway%E2%80%99>

Discover and Learn



Museum of Science & Industry, Chicago | Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation, Dearborn, MI | Fort Crawford Museum of Medical Progress, Prairie du Chien, WI | Michigan Iron Industry Museum, Negaunee, MI | WWI and WWII reenactments at Midway Village, Rockford, IL | Cosmosphere, Hutchinson, KS | First Division Museum, Wheaton, IL | National Museum of the Airforce, Dayton, OH | EAA Aviation Museum, Oshkosh, WI | Carillon Historical Park, Dayton, OH | WI Maritime Museum & USS Cobia, Manitowoc, WI | Nat'l WWI Museum, Kansas City, MO | WI Veterans Museum, Madison, WI | IL Holocaust Museum, Skokie, IL | Nat'l Museum of Transportation, St. Louis, MO | GAT sites <https://www.greatamericantreasures.org/destinations/>



History Mapped Out videos <https://www.youtube.com/@HistoryMappedOut/playlists>



Around the World

During the Cold War, nations were categorized:

First World: Capitalism/Industrialized

- U.S. & Western Europe

Second World: Communist

- USSR & allies in Eastern Europe

Third World: Developing or Impoverished

- Newly independent / post-Colonial

6

Soaring Higher

“Carpe Diem:” Seize the Day!¹

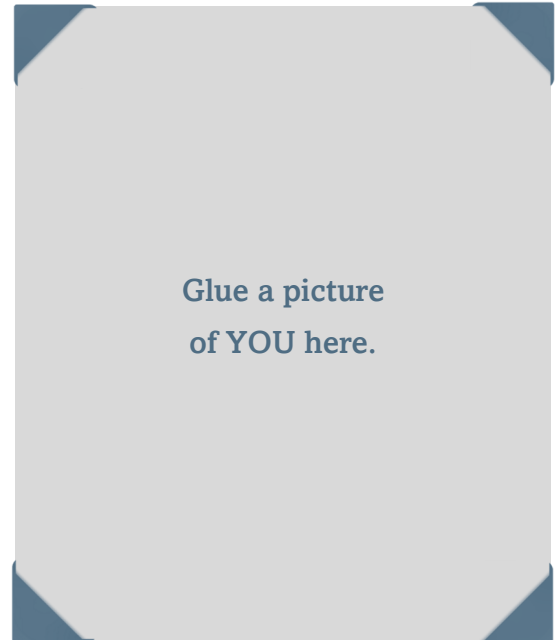
Your Story in the Big Picture

Let’s climb aboard the International Space Station as it orbits the earth. It’s breathtaking to see our beautiful blue planet ever turning in the blackness of space.

If our world is a tiny speck in the vast expanse of the universe, then how much smaller you and I. And, yet, each life has purpose – a role to play in its own time in history. Your little story comes together with everyone else’s little stories to form the big-picture story of the world. You might seem insignificant from this vantage point, but your story has value.

How we live our lives matters. The roles we play in our families and communities matter. “Just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far-reaching effects.”²

What is history teaching you? How is it changing you? How can you apply its lessons to the way you understand and engage with the world around you today?



¹Book 1 of *Odes*, Roman poet Horace; ²Dalai Lama



AT A GLANCE:

Origins ● Early Societies & Empires ● Hemispheres Collide ●

History: The Good...and the Bad and the Ugly, Too

We all enjoy a story. ...and that is what **history** is: a collection of the personal stories of all the people that have ever lived. History is what happens when real people live and interrelate within the rolling and pitching circumstances of the real world. “There are no extraordinary men [and women]...just extraordinary circumstances that ordinary [people] are forced to deal with.”³

The drama of humankind includes a whole lot of emotionally-charged scenes – from the beautiful, heartwarming, and thrilling to the offensive, distressing, and incomprehensible. We might be tempted to pretty up the ugly stuff...or toss it out...or remake it into something it's not based on modern views. But then we miss critical insights. Listening carefully to what the past communicates to us in the present is valuable.

Here at the Historic Indian Agency House, we do not attempt to hide the shortcomings of players in our historic site's story. Our purpose for existence is not to defend nor disparage our key historical figures' perspectives. If we attempt to clean up their flaws, all we've really done is scrub the real human beings out of the story. On the other hand, if we focus only on their flaws, we miss the bigger picture. Just as an aged patina adds value to an antique, so does the tarnish of reality add something important to history. We lose something if we try to shine it up.

“History is a guide to navigation in perilous times. History is who we are and why we are the way we are.”⁴

“History is philosophy teaching by example and also by warning.”⁵

³US Naval Admiral William Halsey; ⁴David McCullough, cited in *Life, Death and In Between*; ⁵Henry St John, “Letters on the Study & Use of History”



At the Fox-Wisconsin Portage

The 1832 Indian Agency House at Fort Winnebago became a museum in 1932 to preserve its stories. That's a fascinating story in and of itself! Read about it here:



www.agencyhouse.org/museum-history

Around the World

An ancient man implored: “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”⁶ ...good advice for today. Life is short. Value each day to make it count. Keep learning. Apply wisdom to your own role in the big story.

⁶Moses, Psalm 90:12



Conclusion: The Big Picture

History is like a river.

History surges forward, shifting and churning, tossing over rocks here, tearing fiercely through its banks there, drifting and swirling serenely at another bend.

A river is made up of countless microscopic water molecules plus all the living and non-living components carried along in its current. We don't exclusively concentrate on individual water droplets or each grain of sand. We gain perspective by looking at the river as a whole and noting the factors, features, and forces which affect its movement. In the same way, we may not know something about every individual who has ever lived, but we can see how all their contributions together influenced the flow of the human story. The big picture of history gives us an important awareness as we survey its course from the very beginnings and then sweep our eyes toward the horizon where history disappears from view and *becomes our future*.





Historic Indian Agency House

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