10 Days That Unexpectedly Changed America
By Steven M. Gillon

A panel of leading historians undertook the challenge to come up with some less well known but historically significant events that triggered change in America—excluding any which have occurred after 1965. They deliberately sought out ‘surprising dates’ that would provoke discussion and debate. Such ‘obvious’ events as the signing of the Constitution and the attack on Pearl Harbor were overlooked in favor of days whose importance and impact have been undervalued.

What has been compiled tells the story of America ‘from the bottom up’—the stories of rural farmers and gold diggers, immigrant workers and disenfranchised Americans as well as brilliant scientists and noble statesman who have almost single handedly changed the course of American history. Although independent of each other, the stories develop themes that tie each together.

The outcome is a demonstration of some essential truths about our history; namely that key moments are often the product of random events, not purposeful actions, and that the story of America is a work in progress— not set in stone but full of internal tensions and contractions. Another theme has to do with the very nature of democratic history. Democracy in America has had a remarkably redemptive characteristic; the ability to adapt and change as well as to mete out justice. There is also a theory of history implicit in each account. ‘The past is never dead. Indeed, it is not even past.

1) The first essay ‘Massacre at Mystic’ challenges you to reconcile the tragic irony of American history: a nation founded on the highest ideals was built on slaughter and destruction of epic proportion. The brutal Puritan victory over the Indians of New England set a pattern for European and Indian relations for the next two centuries. It became an ‘archetype of all the wars which followed’. There would be no assimilation of Indian culture.

Yet this story also highlights the redemptive quality of American democracy; the ability to adapt, to change, and occasionally to right past wrongs. “After a 350 year truce, the Mashantucket Pequot may have actually won the Pequot War.”

a) What were the ‘roots’ of the battle at Mystic?
b) The massacre at Mystic became a model for how whites would treat natives across the continent as the wilderness became transformed into civilization. Explain
c) Referring to this case, in what ways can democracy be both destructive and redemptive?
d) How did Europeans justify their brutality towards the Pequots and Indians in general?
e) In what ways is Manifest Destiny an expression of the prevailing attitudes towards Native Americans?

Terms:
“City on the Hill”
James Fenimore Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans
King Philip's War
Manifest Destiny
Indian Removal Act of 1830
Trail of Tears

2) The second essay raises an interesting question about cause and effect in history. ‘Would the founding fathers have adopted a different constitution had Daniel Shays not led his ragtag army in rebellion against Massachusetts authorities?’ It also highlights a critical tension in defining democracy; how to balance the demands and fears of democracy with the need to preserve social order?

In effect Daniel Shays exposed the fragility and fears of the democratic experiment. James Madison declared the rebellion in Massachusetts to be a ‘warning’. Ironically, the
American Revolution, which was intended to limit the powers of government instead created an even stronger central authority in the **Constitution**. The fears of ‘mobocracy’ shaped the founding fathers’ discussion over the new constitution and the document reflects the essential conservative nature of the group.

Since first exposed by a man so shadowy that historians do not even know what he looks like, the gap between the ideals of democracy and the realities of power remain open as we debate the size and scope of our government today.

Is big government the problem or is it the solution? The Reagan Revolution and the rise of Rush Limbaugh, and the election of President Obama have breathed life into the essential over which Shays Rebellion took place. ‘The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

**a)** Daniel Shays has become known to historians as ‘the godfather’ of the United States Constitution. Explain how he and his followers ‘lost the rebellion but won the peace’.

**b)** Explain how the **barter system** worked in colonial America. Why did the system come crashing down after the Treaty of Paris of 1783?

**c)** Identify the two very different views of the legacy of the American Revolution and the true nature of democratic government held by the Shaysites on the one hand and the conservatives on the other. Which has ‘won’ out?

**d)** What role did George Washington play in the success of the Constitutional Convention?

**e)** What were the elements built into the constitution by the founding fathers to protect the fledgling democracy against radicalism?

**f)** Explain the gap between the ideals of the revolution expressed in the Articles of Confederation and the realities of power enshrined in the Constitution. What measure were put into the body of the Constitution to control the rise of radicalism?

**g)** In what ways could southerners during the Civil War claim a common heritage with Daniel Shays to support states rights and secession?

Terms:

- **Treaty of Paris of 1783**
- **Articles of Confederation**
- **Regulators**
- **Meritocracy**
- **The Federalist Papers (Federalist #51)**
- **Federalists**
- **Anti-Federalists**
- **demagogue**
- **Huey Long**
- **Joseph McCarthy**

3) “Like Argos of the ancient times, I’ll leave this modern Greece; I’m bound to California mines to find the golden fleece.”

The **third story** tells the incredible tale of the largest mass movement of people in world history. “Neither the Crusades nor Alexander’s expedition to India can equal this emigration to California.” Once the **discovery of gold** in California was officially declared by President Polk in his State of the Union Address on December 5th, 1848, “The world rushed in.”

California became a place that no other country could imitate with its diversity of race, religion, color, language, government, condition, size, strength and morals. American and world history were changed forever; in some ways beneficial, in other ways not so.

**a)** What were the political, economic, social and environmental effects of the California gold rush.

**b)** How did these effects shape and define what it meant (and means) to be an American?.
c) Evaluate the beneficial and negative effects of the consequences of the gold rush.
d) Explain why the discovery of gold in California and the end of the Mexican-American War can be considered one of the most remarkable coincidences in American History.
e) How was the forging of a new cosmopolitan culture in California a continuation of a familiar pattern of American racism and discrimination?
f) How did the discovery of gold transform the American Dream in contradiction to the Puritan and Jeffersonian notions of success?

Terms:
Sutter's Fort
American Dream
Mexican-American War
49ers
Overland Trail
Oregon Trail
Missouri Compromise
Wilmot Proviso
Compromise of 1850
Popular sovereignty
Fugitive Slave Act
Kansas-Nebraska Act
Uncle Tom's Cabin
Dred Scott Decision

4) In one of the most exciting ‘what ifs’ in the history of the world, when Corporal Barton W. Mitchell of the 27th Indiana Regiment laid his head under the shade of a tree in a meadow east of Frederick, Maryland and found a bulky envelope with three cigars, the course of the Civil War and with it the emancipation of slavery and the course of the Civil War and with it the future of the American experiment in democracy turned completely around. How would American history have unfolded if ..........?
The fourth essay explores the effects of finding General Robert E. Lee’s Order #191 which allowed the slow-footed General McClellan to defeat the onrushing, if outnumbered Confederate army at the Battle of Antietam—forever dissuading the British from recognizing the Confederacy and deflating the mounting Northern peace movement.
In the Battle of Antietam on September 17th, 1862, in which four times as many Americans died on the battlefield than were killed in the D-Day invasion of Normandy, the shape of the American nation took form. The victory, even though it was rather tentative, gave impetus to the birth of modern America.
a) What were the elements of the modern American nation which took shape as a result of the Union victory in the Civil war and how is the legacy of Antietam alive today in both South and North?
b) What were the advantages and relative disadvantages of the Union and Confederacy in the Civil War?
c) How did each side justify the war? How did Lincoln frame the issues upon which he sent nearly 600,000 men to their death?
d) How did the nature of the civil war change as a result of the ‘victory’ at Antietam?
e) How did the Emancipation Proclamation transform the war into a struggle over the meaning of ‘freedom’? How was the issuance of the Proclamation related to the Battle of Antietam?

Terms:
Copperheads
Emancipation Proclamation
Total war
Sherman’s March to the Sea
Appomattox Truce
13th Amendment
14th Amendment
15th Amendment

5) Chapter five is the woeful saga of working class democracy in America - its rise and death in Homestead, Pennsylvania on July 6th, 1892. One of many ever present tensions in American democracy took on yet another form; the individual (and collective) rights of workers versus the public good. While workers joined unions and looked to their government to protect their quality of life, management looked to government to protect the property rights of business so as to allow prosperity to prevail.

Sometimes it takes decades to discern the significance of a historical event. That was not the case at the Homestead Steel strike. As the brilliance of the second industrial revolution grew brighter, the already strong alliance between big business and the power of the state doomed any hope that workers could ‘own’ the factories where they toiled 12 hours a day, seven days a week. The growth of America’s industrial supremacy came at a great cost; the alternative vision of working class democracy was doomed.

a) ‘The shots fired at Homestead, like the shots fired at Lexington, were heard around the world...as were the shots fired at Mystic, Connecticut, Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Battle of Antietam, and no less than the words proclaimed by President Polk on December 5th, 1848.’ Explain

b) What were the opposing visions of the meaning of democracy articulated by American workers and industrial owners. How are these ‘visions’ of democracy similar to and different from those articulated by Daniel Shays and the Founding Fathers?

c) What were the consequences of the coming of the ‘second industrial revolution’ for American workers.

d) Describe the relationship between big business and government? What was the affect on organized labor? How did this relationship influence the future of industry in America?

Terms:
Terrence Powderly
Haymarket Square Riot
Andrew Carnegie
Henry Clay Frick
First and Second Industrial Revolutions
Frederick W. Taylor
‘Iron clad’ contracts
Lockout
Coxey’s Army
Pullman Strike
Eugene Debs
CHAPTER 1
New World Beginnings, 33,000 B.C.–A.D. 1769

PART I: REVIEWING THE CHAPTER

A. Checklist of Learning Objectives
After mastering this chapter, you should be able to:
1. Describe the geological and geographical conditions that set the stage for North American history.
2. Describe the origin and development of the major Indian cultures of the Americas.
3. Explain the developments in Europe and Africa that led to Columbus’s voyage to America.
4. Explain the changes and conflicts that occurred when the diverse worlds and peoples of Europe, Africa, and the Americas collided after 1492.
5. Describe the Spanish conquest of Mexico and South America, and of the later Spanish colonial expansion into North America.
6. Describe the major features of Spain’s New World Empire, including relations with the native Indian populations.

PART II: CHECKING YOUR PROGRESS

A. True-False
Where the statement is true, circle T; where it is false, circle F.
1. T  F  The geography of the North American continent was fundamentally shaped by the advance and retreat of glaciers during the Great Ice Age.
2. T  F  Native peoples of northeast Asia continued to migrate across the land bridge from Siberia to Alaska until the time of Columbus.
3. T  F  The early Indian civilizations of Mexico and Peru were built on the economic foundations of cattle herding and wheat growing.
4. T  F  Most American Indians north of Mexico lived in small, seminomadic agricultural and hunting communities.
5. T  F  Many Indian cultures like the Iroquois traced descent and passed possessions through the female line.
6. T  F  No Europeans had ever set foot on the American continents prior to Columbus’s arrival in 1492.
7. T  F  A primary motive for the European voyages of discovery was the desire to find a less expensive route to Asian luxury goods and markets.
8. T  F  African slavery first developed in the aftermath of the Spanish conquest of the Americas.
9. T  F  Columbus immediately recognized in 1492 that he had come across vast new continents previously unknown to Europeans.
10. T  F  The greatest effect of the European intrusion into the Americas was to increase the Indian and mestizo population through intermarriage with the whites.
11. T F The primary cause of the massive population decline among native Americans after the European arrival was not warfare but disease.
12. T F The Spanish *conquistadores* had little to do with the native peoples of Mexico and refused to intermarry with them.
13. T F The Spanish were able to defeat the Aztecs because the Aztecs had no experience with a sophisticated, urban civilization.
14. T F Spain expanded its empire north into Florida and Texas partly to block French ambitions and protect their Caribbean Sea lanes.
15. T F The Spanish Empire in the New World was larger, richer, and longer-lasting than that later established by the English.

**B. Multiple Choice**
Select the best answer and write the proper letter in the space provided.
1. The geologically oldest mountains in North America are the
   a. Appalachians.
   b. Rockies.
   c. Cascades.
   d. Sierra Nevada.
   e. Ozarks.
2. The Indian peoples of the Americas
   a. developed no advanced forms of civilization.
   b. migrated by boat from the South Pacific region about 10,000 B.C.
   c. were under the control of the two large empires of the Incas and the Aztecs.
   d. relied primarily on nomadic hunting for their sustenance.
   e. were divided into many diverse cultures speaking more than two thousand different languages.
3. Which of the following was *not* among the ancient Indian cultures established in North America prior to 1300 A.D.?
   a. The Incas
   b. The Pueblos
   c. The Anasazis
   d. The Mississippian culture (Cahokia)
   e. The Mound Builders
4. One of the important factors that first stimulated European interest in trade and discovery was
   a. the Christian crusaders who brought back a taste for the silks and spices of Asia.
   b. the Arab slave traders on the east coast of Africa.
   c. the Scandinavian sailors who had kept up continuous trade contacts with North America.
   d. the division of Spain into small kingdoms competing for wealth and power.
   e. Copernicus’s discovery that the earth revolved around the sun.
5. Among the most important American Indian products or discoveries to spread to the Old World were
   a. animals such as buffalo and horses.
   b. technologies such as the compass and the wheel.
   c. clothing such as buckskin and beaver fur hats.
   d. foodstuffs such as corn, beans, and tomatoes.
   e. methods of calculating time such as the lunar calendar and the sundial.
6. The primary staples of Indian agriculture before the European arrival were
   a. potatoes, beets, and sugar cane.
   b. rice, sweet potatoes, and peanuts.
   c. fruit, nuts, and honey.
   d. wheat, oats, and barley.
   e. corn, beans, and squash.

7. The number of Indians in North America at the time Columbus arrived was approximately
   a. one million.
   b. four million.
   c. twenty million.
   d. one hundred and fifty million.
   e. three hundred million.

8. Before Columbus arrived, the only Europeans known to have visited North America, temporarily, were
   the
   a. Greeks.
   b. Irish.
   c. Norse.
   d. Italians.
   e. Portuguese.

9. Even before the discovery of the Americas, Portugal became the first nation to enter the slave trade and establish large-scale plantations using slave labor in
   a. West Africa.
   b. the Mediterranean islands of Sardinia and Sicily.
   c. the West Indies.
   d. Brazil.
   e. the sugar islands off the coast of Africa.

10. Much of the impetus for Spanish exploration and pursuit of glory in the early 1500s came from Spain’s recent
   a. successful wars with England.
   b. national unification and expulsion of the Muslim Moors.
   c. voyages of discovery along the coast of Africa.
   d. conversion to Roman Catholicism.
   e. founding of the Jesuit order by the Spanish soldier Ignatius Loyola.

11. A crucial political development that paved the way for the European colonization of America was the
   a. rise of Italian city-states like Venice and Genoa.
   b. feudal nobles’ political domination of the merchant class.
   c. rise of the centralized national monarchies such as those of Spain, Portugal, and France.
   d. political alliance between the Christian papacy and Muslim Arab traders.
   e. decline of religious conflict between Roman Catholics and Protestants.

12. The primary reason for the drastic decline in the Indian population after the encounter with the Europeans was the
   a. rise of intertribal warfare.
   b. destruction of major Indian cities and their dispersal into small, nomadic groups.
   c. sharp decline in the Indian birthrate due to the killing of Indian males by the Europeans.
   d. sudden introduction of the deadly disease syphilis to the New World.
   e. Indians’ lack of resistance to European diseases such as smallpox and malaria.
13. Cortés and his men were able to conquer the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán partly because
   a. they had larger forces than the Aztecs.
   b. the Aztec ruler Montezuma believed that Cortés was a god whose return had been predicted.
   c. the Aztecs were a peaceful people with no experience of war or conquest.
   d. the city of Tenochtitlán already had been devastated by a disease epidemic.
   e. Cortes was able to bribe many Aztec warriors to betray their people.

14. The flood of gold and silver from Spain’s New World Empire into Europe after 1500 played a large role in the
   a. rise of capitalism and modern merchant banking.
   b. Protestant Reformation.
   c. development of an industrial working class.
   d. expansion of the jewelry industry.
   e. development of a modern system of precious metal currency.

15. The belief that the Spanish only killed, tortured, and stole in the Americas, while contributing nothing good, is called the
   a. encomienda.
   b. Inquisition.
   c. Evil Empire.
   d. conquistador thesis.
   e. Black Legend.

C. Identification
Supply the correct identification for each numbered description.
1. ________ Extended period when glaciers covered most of the North American continent
2. ________ Staple crop that formed the economic foundation of Indian civilizations
3. ________ Important ancient Anasazi Indian center in New Mexico that included a pueblo of six hundred interconnected rooms
4. ________ First European nation to send explorers around the west coast of Africa
5. ________ Flourishing West African kingdom that had a major Islamic university in the city of Timbuktu
6. ________ The two smaller kingdoms that were united by King Ferdinand and Queen ________
   Isabella to create the powerful nation of Spain
7. ________ Animal introduced to North America by Europeans that transformed the Indian way of life on the Great Plains
8. ________ Name one of the major European diseases that devastated Native American populations after 1492
9. ________ Sexually transmitted disease originating in the Americas that was transmitted and spread among Europeans after 1492
10. ________ Treaty of 1492 that aimed to divide all of the Americas between Spain and Portugal
11. ________ Wealthy and populous capital of the Aztec empire
12. ________ Term for a person of mixed European and Indian
13. __________ A major Pueblo uprising of 1680 caused by Spanish efforts to suppress the Indians’ religious practices
14. __________ Spanish term for the night of June 30, 1520, when war began between Aztecs and Spanish, leading to Spanish conquest of Mexico
15. __________ Roman Catholic religious order of friars that organized a chain of missions in California

D. Matching People, Places, and Events

1. ___ Ferdinand and Isabella a. Female Indian slave who served as interpreter for Cortés
2. ___ Hernan Cortés and Francisco Pizarro b. Legendary founder of the powerful Iroquois Confederacy
3. ___ Lake Bonneville c. Wealthy capital of the Aztec empire
4. ___ Días and da Gama d. Financiers and beneficiaries of Columbus’s voyages to the New World
5. ___ Christopher Columbus e. Portuguese navigators who sailed around the African coast
6. ___ Malinche f. Dominican friar who sympathized with Indians and protested cruel Spanish policies in the New World
7. ___ Moctezuma g. Founded in 1565, the oldest continually inhabited European settlement in United States territory
8. ___ Hiawatha h. Italian-born navigator sent by English to explore North American coast in 1498
9. ___ Tenochtitlán i. Italian-born explorer who thought that he had arrived off the coast of Asia rather than on unknown continents
10. ___ St. Augustine j. Powerful Aztec monarch who fell to Spanish conquerors
11. ___ Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) k. Spanish conquerors of great Indian civilizations
12. ___ Junipero Serra l. Franciscan missionary who settled California
13. ___ Bartolome de Las Casas m. Inland sea left by melting glaciers whose remnant is the Great Salt Lake