

The American Yawp

VOLUME I: to 1877

Discussion Questions

1. American Origins

- What did more to change pre-Columbian Indigenous life, environmental factors or human choices?
- How did Indigenous people understand their own origins?
- How did geography shape Native American life?
- What were different ways that Indigenous people used political power?
- What were the biggest turning points in pre-Columbian Native American history?

2. Making an Atlantic World

- What explains the Iberian kingdoms' rise to power?
- What were the major sources of wealth in Africa from 1300-1600 CE?
- What motivated European exploration?
- How did religion shape Spanish and Portuguese colonization?
- How did Spain organize and administer its empire?

3. Colliding Cultures

- Why did the Spanish, Dutch, French, and English treat Native people differently?
- What were some of the global effects of the colonization of the Americas?
- How did Native Americans respond to colonization?
- Why did England want to create colonies?
- What explains the differences between Virginia and New England?

4. British North America

- How did political turmoil in 17th century Britain influence life in the colonies?
- What was the relationship between religion and government in the colonies?
- How and why did Virginia shift from indentured servitude to slavery?
- How did the trans-Atlantic slave trade work?
- How did geography influence life for enslaved people?

5. Colonial Society

- Did the consumer revolution do more to create unity or conflict in colonial America?
- How did the antislavery movement begin in North America?
- What were the causes and consequences of the Great Awakening?

- What role did American colonists play in the Seven Years War?
- How did Native American life change in the 18th century?

6. The American Revolution

- How did the United States of America become an independent nation?
- What were some of the differing ideas about empire and colonialism within England and the American colonies?
- How did England try to raise money from the colonists?
- Why did the United States declare independence?
- In what ways did the Revolutionary War disrupt life for the people living in North America?

7. A New Nation

- How radical was the American Revolution?
- What were the successes and failures of the Articles of Confederation?
- What compromises were made at the Constitutional Convention?
- How did the French and Haitian Revolutions affect the United States?
- Was the United States founded as a Christian nation?

8. The Early Republic

- Did the United States draw more from the vision of Alexander Hamilton or Thomas Jefferson?
- What was Republican Motherhood and how did it change understandings of gender?
- How did slave rebellions, in the U.S. and beyond, change the life and laws of the nation?
- How did Native American nations interact with the U.S. in the early period?
- How did the War of 1812 change American life?

9. Getting Forward

- Did technology do more to expand or contract freedom in the early antebellum era?
- What were the causes and consequences of the Panic of 1819?
- What was the Second Great Awakening?
- How did enslaved people endure their bondage?
- What were the causes and consequences of the Missouri Crisis?

10. American Democracy

- Is Andrew Jackson's presidency best understood as tragedy, triumph, or irony?
- How did understandings of democracy change from the American Revolution to the 1830s?
- What did the Whig Party stand for?
- What was the relationship between slavery and Indigenous dispossession?
- How did the antislavery movement change over the 1830s?

11. Growth and Conflict

- Did Western expansion do more to unite or divide Americans in the antebellum era?
- What beliefs characterized Manifest Destiny?
- How did understandings of gender change in antebellum America?
- Why did the United States go to war against Mexico?
- What motivated and divided activists in the 1840s?

12. The National Crisis

- How did conflict over states' rights vs federal power contribute to secession?
- How did policy makers compromise over the question of slavery in the West?
- What did the various political parties stand for in the 1850s?
- What was more significant, the Dred Scott decision or the Kansas and Nebraska Act?
- Why did the South secede?

13. The Civil War

- How did the Union win the war?
- What did the Confederacy stand for?
- What were the international ramifications of the Civil War?
- How and why did slavery end in the United States?
- How did the Civil War transform American government?

14. Reconstruction

- What important pieces of legislation were passed during Reconstruction, and how did they change American life?
- How did African Americans respond to emancipation?
- What role did terrorism play in Reconstruction?
- Why did Reconstruction end?
- Was Reconstruction a success or failure?

[Updated June 17, 2026. CC BY-SA 4.0. The American Yamp. <http://www.americanyamp.com>]