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101 Things Every College Graduate Should Know About American History

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This is not a test. It's the real thing.

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How precise is the educated American's understanding of the history of our country? I don't mean exact knowledge of minor dates, or small details about the terms of laws, or questions like "Who was secretary of war in 1851?" (Answer: Charles M. Conrad.) But just how well does the average person remember the important facts—the laws, treaties, people, and events that should be familiar to everyone?

What follows is not a test; nor are these items necessarily the most important things to know about American history. But these are all things an American-educated person might reasonably be expected to be familiar with. Most of them can be found in my college textbook *The American Nation* or in any similar work. A good secondary school teacher might mention any of them in the course of a lecture or class discussion.

If you have never heard of most of these items, either you have a particularly poor memory or teachers like me have not accomplished what we set out to do. On the other hand, if you already know that, in addition to being President Millard Fillmore's secretary of war, Charles M. Conrad killed a man in a duel (according to the *Dictionary of American Biography* , he was "very intense in his convictions and tenaciously persistent in support of whatever cause he espoused") and served at various times in both houses of the United States Congress and in the Confederate Congress, you don't have to read another word: you know about everything I have to say here—and a lot more. But for the majority of readers, here are 101 things you should know about American history.

POLITICS MAKES GOOD SLOGANS

1 TIPPECANOE AND TYLER TOO

Used by the Whig party in 1840, when William Henry Harrison, the hero of the Battle of Tippecanoe, was the Whig presidential candidate, and John Tyler his running mate. The battle, fought in 1811 in Indiana, destroyed the Indian confederacy organized by Tecumseh, a Shawnee chief, and his brother, Tenskwatawa, known as the Prophet.

2 54°40' OR FIGHT

A Democratic rallying cry in the 1844 presidential campaign, referring to the dispute over whether the United States or Great Britain owned the Pacific Northwest, which had been under joint control since 1818. American expansionists, led by the Democratic presidential candidate, James K. Polk, demanded that the United States take over the entire region, which extended to 54°40' north latitude. In 1846 President Polk agreed to a compromise dividing the region at the 49th parallel.

3 VOTE YOURSELF A FARM

Refers to the Republican party's promise in the 1860 campaign to give land in the West to anyone who would settle on it. Unlike so many campaign promises, this one was kept, by passage of the Homestead Act of 1862.

4 HE KEPT US OUT OF WAR

A phrase used by Martin Henry Glynn, a former governor of New York, in the keynote speech at the 1916 Democratic Convention, which nominated Woodrow Wilson for a second term. When it and other references to Wilson's success in maintaining neutrality drew thunderous applause, the Democrats decided to stress that argument in the fall campaign.

5 EVERY MAN A KING

The slogan of the Louisiana senator Huey Long's Share Our Wealth movement during the Great Depression. Long proposed to confiscate all fortunes of more than five million dollars and all incomes of more than one million dollars, and to use the money to give every American family a house, a car, and an annual income of two thousand dollars or more.

6 DON'T SWAP HORSES IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREAM

First used by Republicans to persuade voters to reelect Abraham Lincoln in 1864.

7 A CHICKEN IN EVERY POT

(And a car in every garage.) Used by the Republicans in the 1928 presidential campaign to suggest what they liked to call "Coolidge prosperity."

8 HAD ENOUGH?

The question asked by the Republicans during the 1948 presidential campaign of their candidate, Thomas E. Dewey: after twelve years of "Democratic rule," they maintained, it was "time for a change."

9 A CHOICE, NOT AN ECHO

The postwar rallying cry of conservative Republicans opposed to nominating Republicans who favored accepting most New Deal reforms. When, in 1964, the conservatives succeeded in nominating Barry Goldwater for President, they made wide use of the slogan "In your heart you know he's right," prompting Democrats to retort ...

10 ... IN YOUR GUTS, YOU KNOW HE'S NUTS

11 A PUBLIC OFFICE IS A PUBLIC TRUST

This 1884 Democratic campaign slogan reminded voters that the Republican candidate ("Blaine, Blaine, James G. Blaine, the continental liar from the state of Maine") was believed to have sold favors to a railroad while Speaker of the House in the 1870s.

12 WE DO OUR PART

The motto of NRA, the New Deal National Recovery Administration, was used in conjunction with the famous Blue Eagle emblem to identify the products of companies that had adopted NRA codes of fair business practices.

13 NIXON'S THE ONE

Republican slogan in the 1968 presidential campaign, sometimes used by the Democrats on posters bearing the photograph of a very pregnant black woman.

SEVEN SUPREME COURT DECISIONS 14 MARBURY v. MADISON

(1803). William Marbury sued Secretary of State James Madison in order to obtain a commission appointing him a justice of the peace that had been signed but not delivered by retiring President John Adams. Although the Court initially decided for Marbury, it later realized that its powers to enforce the decision were based on a congressional act that was not constitutional. Marbury never got his post. This was the first time the Court declared a law of Congress unconstitutional.

15 McCuLLOUGH v. MARYLAND

(1819). John W. McCullough, cashier of the Baltimore branch of the Bank of the United States, was sued by Maryland because he refused to pay a tax levied on the bank by the state legislature. The case is notable because, in deciding it in favor of the bank, Chief Justice John Marshall interpreted the powers of Congress broadly. The Constitution did not specifically grant Congress the right to create a bank, but a bank was a reasonable way for Congress to exercise powers enumerated in the document. "Let the end be legitimate," Marshall declared, "and all means which are appropriate ... are constitutional." Since the bank was constitutional and since the Constitution was the supreme law, the

state tax on the bank was unconstitutional because “the power to tax involves the power to destroy.”

16 GIBBONS v. OGDEN

(1824). Thomas Gibbons and Aaron Ogden were rival ferryboat operators. Ogden had been granted the exclusive right to operate a ferry between New York City and New Jersey by New York State, but Gibbons set up a competing line. When Ogden sued, the Supreme Court decided that the New York law was unconstitutional because it interfered with interstate commerce, a prerogative of the federal government. By defining commerce as “intercourse” (and not merely as the movement of goods), the Court laid the basis for the later federal regulation of navigation, radio, and television, and other forms of transportation and communication.

17 MUNN v. ILLINOIS

(1876). This case involved the refusal of Ira V. Munn, a Chicago grain-elevator operator, to obey an 1871 Illinois law regulating the practices of railroads, warehouses, and similar businesses providing services to the public. The Court upheld the Illinois law and seven other similar state laws, ruling that “when private property is devoted to a public use, it is subject to public regulation.”

18 PLESSY v. FERGUSON

(1896). Homer Adolph Plessy, a light-skinned Louisiana black man, was arrested for sitting in a railroad car reserved by Louisiana law for whites. In a New Orleans court his lawyers argued that the law was unconstitutional, but Judge John H. Ferguson ruled against them, on the ground that the railroad had provided separate but equally good cars for blacks, as the law required. This line of reasoning was upheld by the Supreme Court. The case is remembered today mainly for the dissent of Justice John Marshall Harlan. “Our Constitution is color-blind,” Harlan wrote. “The arbitrary separation of citizens, on the basis of race ... is a badge of servitude wholly inconsistent with civil freedom.”

19 BROWN v. BOARD OF EDUCATION OF TOPEKA

(1954). This is the famous school-desegregation case in which the Court unanimously overturned Plessy v. Ferguson. “In the field of public education,” Chief Justice Earl Warren stated, “the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.”

20 ROE v. WADE

(1973). Norma McCorvey (or Jane Roe), a woman prevented from having an abortion by a Texas law, sued to have the law overturned. Henry Wade, a Dallas district attorney, pushed the case up to the Supreme Court. Texas claimed that the case should be dismissed as moot, since the plaintiff had already had her baby. In a controversial decision the Court ruled in McCorvey’s favor, establishing the right of women to have abortions during the early months of pregnancy.

THE WORST SUPREME COURT DECISION

21 DRED SCOTT v. SANDFORD

(1857). A slave, Dred Scott sued for his freedom on the ground that his master, an Army surgeon, had taken him into Illinois and then the Wisconsin Territory, where slavery had been barred by Congress in the Missouri Compromise. The Court, whose majority decision was read by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, ruled that the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional because it violated the property rights protected by the Fifth Amendment, since it denied slave owners the right to take their property wherever they wanted to. In effect, this decision opened all the West to slavery, infuriated the North, and pushed the nation more precipitously toward civil war.

THEY SHOT THE PRESIDENT

22 JOHN WILKES BOOTH

shot and killed Lincoln in a Washington theater in April 1865. Booth was a rabid Confederate sympathizer who believed slavery was "one of the greatest blessings ... God ever bestowed upon a favoured nation."

23 CHARLES J. GUITEAU

shot and killed President James Garfield in Washington's Union Station in July 1880, not, as has often been claimed, because he was a disappointed office seeker, but on the order (he insisted) of "the Diety." Guiteau was, however, an admirer of the New York senator Roscoe Conkling, leader of the Republican faction, who had clashed with Garfield over patronage questions.

24 LEON F. CZOLGOSZ

an anarchist, shot and killed William McKinley in 1901, while McKinley was shaking hands on a reception line at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, because he was against all government and because "I didn't believe one man should have so much services and another man should have none." Almost certainly neither Garfield nor McKinley would have died of their wounds if modern medical techniques had been available.

25 JOHN F. SCHRANK

shot Theodore Roosevelt as TR was leaving a hotel in Milwaukee on his way to make a speech during his Bull Moose campaign in 1912. Though fired at point-blank range, the bullet passed through a folded copy of Roosevelt's hour-long speech and his glasses case before lodging just short of his lung. (If he had been less prolix, he might well have been killed.) Roosevelt insisted on going ahead with the speech before being taken to a hospital. He also insisted that Schrank was not insane, since he had made the attempted assassination in a state that had no death penalty. "I may gravely question," TR later

wrote an English friend, "if he has a more unsound brain than Senator La Follette or Eugene Debs."

26 LEE HARVEY OSWALD

shot and killed John F. Kennedy in 1963, but his motive cannot be determined, nor for that matter can his responsibility for the murder be settled beyond question, since he himself was killed by one Jack Ruby before he could be brought to trial.

27 JOHN W. HINCKLEY, JR.

shot and seriously wounded Ronald Reagan and three members of his party in March 1981 outside a Washington hotel because Hinckley wished to impress Jodie Foster, an actress for whom he had developed a secret passion after seeing her in a movie. The day of the shooting he wrote, but did not mail, a letter to her saying, "the reason I'm going ahead with this attempt now is because I just cannot wait any longer to impress you." Hinckley, who was acquitted on the grounds of insanity, is also alleged to have told someone in Texas that "as far as he was concerned, politicians should be eliminated."

I DON'T KNOW HIM FROM ADAMS

28 SAMUEL ADAMS

(1722–1803), organizer of the Sons of Liberty and the Boston Tea Party, signer of the Declaration of Independence, governor of Massachusetts.

JOHN ADAMS

(1735–1826), cousin of Samuel, one of the drafters of the Declaration of Independence, a negotiator of the Peace Treaty ending the Revolution, first Vice-President and second President of the United States.

ABIGAIL SMITH ADAMS

(1744–1818), wife of John, manager of the family properties during long periods when he was away on public business. Popular with modern feminists, especially for having urged John to "remember the ladies" while helping to create the new nation.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

(1767–1848), son of John and Abigail, diplomat, senator, President of the United States, and, late in life, member of the House of Representatives.

CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS

(1807–86), son of J.Q., presidential candidate of the Free Soil party in 1848, congressman, minister to Great Britain during the Civil War, editor of the papers of John and of John Quincy.

CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS, JR.

(1835–1915), son of Charles, Union officer, historian, railroad executive, public official.

HENRY ADAMS

(1838–1918), second son of Charles Francis, Sr., historian, editor, teacher, novelist, author of *The Education of Henry Adams*.

BROOKS ADAMS

(1848–1927), another son of Charles, Sr., historian, philosopher, professional pessimist.

GOOD PHRASES FOR BIG ISSUES 29 THE GREAT WAR FOR THE EMPIRE

The name given to what is more commonly known as the Seven Years' War by the historian Lawrence Henry Gipson in his monumental *The British Empire before the Revolution* (1936–67). Gipson's point was that what Americans know of as the French and Indian War was part of a worldwide struggle between France and Great Britain for control of vast areas in America and Asia.

30 THE AMERICAN SYSTEM

A scheme designed by Henry Clay in the 1820s. Clay sought to form a coalition of Eastern and Western interests in Congress. In return for Western support of protective tariffs that would benefit Eastern manufacturers, the Easterners would vote for bills providing federal expenditures on roads and canals.

31 THE PECULIAR INSTITUTION

A Southern euphemism for slavery. The term was not intended to be a pejorative; by "peculiar" Southerners meant particular or unique, not odd or queer.

32 MANIFEST DESTINY

This term, coined by John L. O'Sullivan in 1845 in an article in his *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, reflected the expansionist spirit of the era. It was, O'Sullivan wrote, "our manifest [read 'obvious'] destiny to overspread the continent."

33 WAVING THE BLOODY SHIRT

This post-Civil War Republican tactic involved reminding Northern voters that the South was made up mostly of Democrats and that many Northern members of that party had been at best lukewarm about resisting secession. The term came into use after the congressman Benjamin F. Butler displayed before his colleagues the bloodstained shirt of a Northerner who had been flogged in Mississippi. The "bloody shirt" was used by Republicans for decades as a way of diverting attention from politically embarrassing contemporary issues. A classic speech in this vein was given by Robert G. Ingersoll in the campaign of 1880: "Every man that lowered our flag was a Democrat. Every man that bred bloodhounds was a Democrat. Every preacher that said that slavery was a divine institution was a Democrat. Recollect it! Every man that shot a Union soldier was a Democrat. Every wound borne by you Union soldiers is a souvenir of a Democrat."

34 THE ROBBER BARONS

This name was applied to the ultrarich industrialists of the late nineteenth century, such as the railroad magnates Cornelius Vanderbilt and Jay Gould, and the oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller. It originated in the late 1860s but became a symbol for corporate power and the evils of unrestrained economic freedom, only with the publication of Matthew Josephson's best seller *The Robber Barons*, in 1934.

TWENTY WONDERFUL NICKNAMES 35 His ROTUNDITY

John Adams, so called because of his shape.

36 OLD HICKORY

Andrew Jackson, because of his toughness. The name dates from his days as an Indian fighter during the War of 1812. After the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in Alabama in 1814, his Creek Indian foes gave him another name, "Sharp Knife."

37 THE LITTLE MAGICIAN

Martin Van Buren (also called "The Red Fox" and "The American Talleyrand"), because he was a crafty and inventive political manager. His New York machine was known as the Albany Regency because, during the 1820s and 1830s, it ran things while Van Buren spent most of his time away in Washington as senator, secretary of state, Vice-President, and finally as President.

38 HIS ACCIDENCY

John Tyler, so called after he succeeded to the Presidency upon the death of William Henry Harrison, in 1841. Since this was the first time a President had died in office, there was some question as to the extent of Tyler's authority.

39 OLD ROUGH AND READY

Zachary Taylor was given this name by his troops during his long career in the Army, because of his informal yet confidence-building way of dealing with them and his rough-hewn appearance.

40 OLD FUSS AND FEATHERS

Gen. Winfield Scott, like his contemporary Zachary Taylor, was a successful soldier (more, however, as an organizer and strategist than as a battlefield leader). Scott earned this nickname by being extremely vain and something of a blusterer.

41 THE PATHFINDER

John C. Frémont, because of his long career as an explorer and surveyor, and his excellent published reports on his explorations, written with the help of his wife, Jessie, the daughter of Sen. Thomas Hart Benton.

42 THE LITTLE GIANT

Stephen A. Douglas (also called "The Steam Engine in Britches"), because of his short stature (he had a massive head and trunk perched on stubby, almost dwarfish legs), his colorful personality, and his self-confident political style.

43 THE PLUMED KNIGHT

James G. Blaine, so called by his many Republican admirers; the Democrats called him other things. The name was bestowed on Blaine by Robert Ingersoll, a spell-binding orator of the era, in a speech nominating him for President at the 1876 Republican Convention. The nomination, however went to ...

44 ...HIS FRAUDULENCY

Rutherford B. Hayes, who won the Presidency in the famous disputed election of 1876. Hayes's wife, who would not allow liquor in the White House, was known as "Lemonade Lucy."

45 THE GREAT COMMONER

William Jennings Bryan (also called "The Boy Orator of the Platte" and "The Peerless Leader"), because of his stress on being a product of and a representative of "the people." When the free-silver issue surfaced in the 1890s, Bryan, then in the House of Representatives, announced: "The people of Nebraska are for free silver. Therefore I am for free silver. I'll look up the reasons later."

46 THE ROUGH RIDER

Theodore Roosevelt (also called "TR" and "Teddy," which latter name he disliked intensely), because of the regiment of that name, composed of a motley mixture of

cowboys, adventurers, and odd characters raised by Roosevelt to fight in the Spanish-American War.

47 THE OHIO ICICLE

Sen. John Sherman of Ohio, sponsor of the Sherman Antitrust Act, because of his stiff, colorless personality. Sherman is thought to have invented the political term “to mend some fences.”

48 BIG BILL

William Howard Taft, because he weighed more than three hundred pounds.

49 SILENT CAL

Calvin Coolidge, who had little to say and said it economically—e.g., “The business of the United States is business” and, when asked if he would seek réélection in 1928, “I do not chose to run.”

50 THE HAPPY WARRIOR

Alfred E. Smith, who was given this name by Franklin D. Roosevelt in the course of a speech nominating him for President at the 1928 Democratic convention.

51 THE KINGFISH

Huey P. Long, because of his total dominance of his native state of Louisiana.

52 TAIL GUNNER JOE

Joseph R. McCarthy, the Communist-hunting senator who claimed—falsely—to have been a tail gunner on American bombers during World War II.

53 TRICKY DICK

Richard M. Nixon, because of his shifty, calculating political style. The phrase long antedated the Watergate scandal.

54 LANDSLIDE LYNDON

Lyndon B. Johnson, because of the paper-thin margin by which he was first elected to Congress, in 1936.

TEN PAINTINGS THAT SAY “AMERICA”

55 PAUL REVERE

by John Singleton Copley (painted in 1765–70).

56 THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

by John Trumbull (1786–97).

57 GEORGE WASHINGTON

by Gilbert Stuart. The “unfinished” version (1796).

58 EXHUMING THE MASTODON

by Charles Willson Peale (1801).

59 RAFTSMEN PLAYING CARDS

by George Caleb Bingham (1847).

60 THE CLINIC OF DR. GROSS

by Thomas Eakins (1875).

61 THE GULF STREAM

by Winslow Homer (1886).

62 STAG AT SHARKEY'S

by George Bellows (1907).

63 AMERICAN GOTHIC

by Grant Wood (1930).

64 FLAG

by Jasper Johns (1955).

QUOTATIONS WORTH QUOTING

65 "I heard the bullets whistle, and, believe me, there is something charming in the sound." (George Washington, writing to his brother after his first experience in battle, in 1754. When the letter was published in Great Britain, King George II is said to have remarked that the young soldier would not have found the sound so charming "if he had been used to hearing more.")

66 O! ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose not only the tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth!" (Thomas Paine, urging the colonies to declare their independence, in *Common Sense*, 1776.)

67 "Sell [our] country! Why not sell the air, the clouds, and the great sea?" (Tecumseh, resisting suggestions that the Indians cede their lands in the Ohio Country to the United States, 1810.)

68 "Don't give up the the ship!" (Capt. James Lawrence after being mortally wounded in the battle between the USS Chesapeake and HMS Shannon, 1813.) A somewhat fuller version of the line runs, "Tell the men to fire faster and not to give up the ship; fight her till she sinks."

69 "The mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God." (Thomas Jefferson, letter to Roger C. Weightman, 1826.)

70 The American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintained, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers." (James Monroe enunciating the Monroe Doctrine in his annual message to Congress, 1823.)

71 "The politicians of New York are not so fastidious as some gentlemen are, as to disclosing the principles on which they act. They boldly preach what they practice. ... If they are defeated, they expect to retire from office. If they are successful, they claim, as a matter of right, the advantages of success. They see nothing wrong in the rule that to the victor belongs the spoils of the enemy." (Sen. William L. Marcy, defending Jackson's appointment of Martin Van Buren as minister to Great Britain, 1831.)

72 "The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her." (Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, "Declaration of Sentiments" at the Woman's Rights Convention, Seneca Falls, New York, 1848.)

73 "If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would do that. ... I have here stated my purpose according to my official duty, and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men, everywhere, could be free." (Abraham Lincoln, replying to the appeal of editor Horace Greeley [August 1862] that he emancipate the slaves.)

74 “It is well that war is so terrible—we should grow too fond of it.” (Gen. Robert E. Lee, speaking to Gen. James Longstreet during the Battle of Fredericksburg, 1863.)

75 “The man of wealth [should] consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer ... to produce the most beneficial results for the community—the man of wealth thus becoming the mere trustee and agent for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves.” (Andrew Carnegie, “Wealth,” 1889.)

76 “To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is their next-door neighbor, I would say, ‘Cast down your bucket where you are.’” (Booker T. Washington, speaking at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition, 1895.)

77 “... Mr. Washington apologizes for injustice, he belittles the emasculating effects of caste distinctions, and opposes the higher training and ambitions of our brighter minds. ... The way for people to gain their reasonable rights is not by voluntarily throwing them away.” (W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others,” 1903.)

78 “The main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.” (“X” [George F. Kennan], “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” 1947.)

79 “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.” (President Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1961.)

80 “I am not a crook.” (President Richard M. Nixon, 1974.)

SOME FAMOUS THINGS THEY DIDN'T SAY

81 “Caesar had his Brutus; Charles the First his Cromwell; and George the Third [The Speaker: Treason!]. ...” (Patrick Henry attacking the Stamp Act in the Virginia House of Burgesses, 1765.) Henry did say something like this, though no copy of his speech exists. But he almost surely did not add “may profit by this example. If this be treason, make the most of it.” The evidence that he said that consists of the recollections of eyewitnesses recorded nearly half a century later. The only contemporary account claims that “henery,” when interrupted by the Speaker, “said that if he had affronted the speaker, or the house, he was ready to ask pardon, and he would show his loyalty to his majesty, King G. the third, at the Expense of the last drop of his blood.”

82 “Entangling alliances.” A phrase often incorrectly said to come from George Washington’s Farewell Address. Washington warned not against “entangling” alliances but against both “passionate attachments” and “inveterate antipathies” to particular foreign

countries. It was Thomas Jefferson who said, in his first Inaugural, “peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none.”

83 “Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute.” Charles Cotesworth Pinckney was supposed to have said this in 1797 when he and two other American diplomats who were trying to negotiate a commercial treaty with the French were asked for a bribe by agents of the foreign minister Talleyrand. What Pinckney did say was, “No! No! Not a sixpence!”

84 “The only good Indian is a dead Indian.” Attributed to Gen. Philip Sheridan, who in fact said something only slightly less objectionable: “The only good Indians I ever saw were dead.”

85 “Lafayette, we are here” was not said by General Pershing upon setting foot on French soil at the head of the first contingents of the American Expeditionary Forces in 1917. It was said by an aide, Charles E. Stanton.

86 “Prosperity is just around the corner.” Though often attributed to Herbert Hoover, the former President always denied having used the phrase. Actually there was nothing fatuous in the statement, even if Hoover had made it. Well into 1931 most people believed the Depression would be short. Hoover claimed that his enemies were twisting a statement he made in 1930: “I am convinced we have passed the worst and with continued effort we will rapidly recover.”

87 “What’s good for General Motors is good for the country.” What Charles E. Wilson, former head of General Motors, actually said in testifying before the Senate committee considering his nomination in 1953 to be secretary of defense was a bit different: “I thought that what was good for our country was good for General Motors, and vice versa.”

KNOW THESE SIX GREAT HISTORIANS (BECAUSE THEY’RE OUR BEST) 88 GEORGE BANCROFT

—because his ten-volume *History of the United States* (published 1834–74) was the first detailed account from the discovery to the end of the Revolution, based on archives in America and Europe. Bancroft was also secretary of the Navy and minister to Great Britain in the Polk administration and minister to Prussia after the Civil War.

89 FRANCIS PARKMAN

—because his multivolume history (1851–92) of France’s exploration and colonization of North America and of the Franco-British struggle for control of the continent is one of the most gripping narrative histories in the English language. Although Parkman had many prejudices (he considered Indians untrustworthy savages and Catholics undemocratic), his enormous work, completed despite years of fragile health and near-blindness, is both beautifully written and factually accurate.

90 HENRY ADAMS

(one of the Adamses, see item 28)—because his *History of the United States during the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison* (1889–91) is still a major source for the period. In addition Adams taught at Harvard, where he sponsored the first history Ph.D.’s granted

by the university, and wrote other important works of history, two novels, and his autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918).

91 FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER

—because his essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893), which stressed the way the frontier experience had affected American development, was a major influence on the writing of all American history for more than half a century.

92 CHARLES A. BEARD

—because his controversial *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (1913) put an end to the view of the Founding Fathers as demigods by emphasizing that the Constitution they created benefited them financially. Beard is also important because his *The Rise of American Civilization* (1927–42), written with his wife, Mary, provided a gripping narrative account of American development that stressed economic, intellectual, and social aspects.

93 ALLAN NEVINS

—because, besides training more than a hundred Ph.D.'s and writing dozens of excellent historical works on subjects ranging from the Civil War to Henry Ford, which won him two Pulitzer Prizes, a National Book Award, and numerous other honors, he was a lifelong advocate of the writing of good popular history, and one of the founders of American Heritage.

SEVEN SPEECHES TO REMEMBER 94 GEORGE WASHINGTON'S FAREWELL ADDRESS

(1796), in which he stressed the importance of national unity as the “main pillar” of the nation’s independence, peace, and prosperity.

95 THOMAS JEFFERSON'S FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS

(1801), which contains his famous reference to the United States as “the world’s best hope” and his praise of “wise and frugal Government which shall restrain men from injuring one another, [and] shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits.” At the time, the fact that Jefferson’s election marked the first real change of party control of the government made his promise to respect the rights of the Federalist minority seem the most important point in the address.

96 DANIEL WEBSTER'S SECOND REPLY TO HAYNE

(1830), in which he called the American flag “the gorgeous ensign of the republic” and concluded with the sentence. “Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable.” Webster’s grandiloquence was much admired by contemporaries, but the speech was actually important because of its powerful refutation of the passionate but confused argument of South Carolina’s senator Robert Y. Hayne that the separate states were the ultimate source of sovereignty in the American political system.

97 ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S "HOUSE DIVIDED" SPEECH

(1858), delivered on the occasion of his nomination as the Republican candidate for senator from Illinois. This was probably Lincoln's most radical statement about the implications of the slavery issue, the one in which he predicted that "this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free." It got him in some trouble with Northern conservatives, especially when opponents quoted the remark out of context in order to suggest that Lincoln was an abolitionist. Lincoln did not, in this speech or on any other occasion before the war, call for the abolition of slavery.

98 WILLIAM JENMNGS BRYAN'S "CROSS OF GOLD" SPEECH

at the 1896 Democratic National Convention. Bryan, arguing for a plank in the party platform calling for the free coinage of silver, ended with the sentence "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold." "You" were the Gold Democrats, the supporters of the incumbent President, Grover Cleveland, who opposed the unlimited coinage of silver. The speech made a national figure of the thirty-six-year-old Bryan and led to his nomination for the Presidency by the convention.

99 WOODROW WILSON'S CALL FOR DECLARATION OF WAR AGAINST GERMANY

(1917), which contains the famous line "The world must be made safe for democracy." The speech is remarkable for Wilson's insistence that "we have no quarrel with the German people. ... We fight without rancor and without selfish object." Such forbearance and Wilson's promise that victory would result in a "universal dominion of right" helped win liberal support for the war effort, but it contributed to postwar disillusionment when his idealistic hopes were not realized.

100 FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT'S FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS

(1933), remembered for the line "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself," for Roosevelt's promise "to put people to work," and perhaps for use of the phrase "good neighbor" when referring to foreign policy. It was an extraordinarily effective speech, but it also contained a good deal of windy political foolishness, and a considerable amount of bad advice. For example, the President felt it necessary to point out that "happiness lies not in the mere possession of money"; he promised to balance the federal budget and urged state and local governments to reduce their expenditures "drastically"; and he claimed that there was an "overbalance of population" in the nation's cities.

ONE DATE EVERYONE GETS WRONG

101 It seems almost everyone is unable to remember the year—or even the decade—in which Congress enacted the Missouri Compromise. It was 1820. The compromise admitted Missouri to the Union as a slave state and Maine as a free one, but it also divided the rest of the land obtained from France by the Louisiana Purchase into slave and free territory at 36°30' north latitude, Missouri's southern boundary. Although this

legislation satisfied moderates for a generation, by mid-century the slavery issue was becoming ever more intense.

It was addressed again by the Compromise of 1850; the 1820 act itself was repealed by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which permitted the residents of those territories to decide the slavery question for themselves. Passed in the forlorn hope of maintaining peace, the new legislation instead triggered bloody civil war in Kansas Territory between proslavery and antislavery settlers.

The violence of the 1850s throws the hopeless compromises of that decade into high relief and makes us less aware of the earlier measure.

