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AUTHENTIC AMERICA

250 Distinctly American Places to Explore





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1

Revolutionary Ideals

Adopting the Declaration of Independence brought individuals across the thirteen colonies together to protest British rule. The revolutionary actions of the republic's founding fathers are well-known. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and scores of other patriots played significant roles in the fight for freedom, crafting the US Constitution and providing leadership to a fledgling nation. These ideals, often bold and audacious beyond the prevalent norms of the time, were set by imperfect men seeking a more just and ideal nation. Other patriots, perhaps lesser-known but no less critical, played crucial roles in shaping history. The incredible stories of their contributions to the revolution and the birth and growth of our nation are shared in this and subsequent chapters, demonstrating Americans' individual and collective power to change the world.

The Birth of a Nation

Tensions escalated after the French and Indian War (1756–63) as the British government taxed the colonies to pay for the debt from the expensive conflict through multiple acts from 1765 to 1773.¹ A simple silversmith and messenger rose to become one of the most recognized patriots leading Colonial resistance. Paul Revere, the son of a French Huguenot immigrant, learned the art of gold and silversmithing at his father's shop. After serving two years in the Massachusetts artillery, where he fought the French in upstate New York, Revere returned to Boston in 1756 to build the family's silver business. Although he wasn't present at the March 5, 1770, violent clash when British soldiers fired on colonists (killing five) in front of the Old State House, Paul Revere created a famous engraving of the "Bloody Massacre" (based on a drawing by Henry Pelham) to rally colonists against British policies. A member of the Masonic Lodge of St. Andrew, Revere helped plan and destroy 340 chests of British East India Company tea at Boston's Griffin's Wharf in December 1773—the Boston Tea Party.

Revere began traveling across the colonies, gathering intelligence as a courier for the Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Massachusetts Committee of Safety. Late on April 18, 1775, Paul Revere rode on horseback through the Massachusetts towns of Charlestown, Medford, Menotomy (now Arlington), and Lexington, warning Colonial militia and local patriots that the British were on their way. His warning proved pivotal to the Revolution's momentum. As a result, two Sons of Liberty leaders, John Hancock and Samuel Adams, escaped capture, and this advance notice allowed the militia to prepare for the next day's Battles of Lexington and Concord—the “shot heard around the world” at the start of the Revolutionary War. Revere's patriotism is immortalized in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1860 poem, “Paul Revere's Ride,” published in the *Atlantic Monthly* the following year. As image 1.2 below shows, you can learn more about this patriot at his home (*The Paul Revere House*) on the Freedom Trail in Boston.²

For eight long years (1775–83), the Continental Army, supported by various militia units, fought against the British. Over 1,500 battles and skirmishes occurred during the Revolution, and many sites are preserved today as reminders of the cost of freedom. Pivotal wins (the Battle of Saratoga, the Battle of Trenton, the Battle of Princeton, and the Siege of Yorktown) buoyed the resistance and galvanized international support. And while the British prevailed at Bunker Hill, the heavy casualties they incurred and the Americans' willingness to fight tipped the scales in the patriots' favor. However, devastating defeats at Long Island, White Plains, Brandywine,



Image 1.2 *Paul Revere's house on the historic Boston Freedom Trail. Source: Getty Images/Pgiam.*

Germantown, and Camden led to strategic realignments and adjustments—an American resilience built into our early DNA. Local authors and activists helped rally the patriots even during difficult times. English-born American Thomas Paine inspired Colonial-era patriots to seek self-governance through his 1776 writings, most notably the forty-seven-page pamphlet *Common Sense* and *The American Crisis* bolstering troops during difficult times.³

Many who fought were unsung heroes and ordinary citizens whose contributions were crucial to the Revolution. Mary Ludwig, born of German immigrants in 1754, married a barber named William Hays in her early twenties. William Hays enlisted in the 4th Pennsylvania Artillery when the Revolutionary War started. As was the tradition, wives often joined their husbands at the Continental Army camps to wash clothes and care for the sick. These volunteers became known as “Molly Pitchers.” During the Battle of Monmouth in New Jersey on June 28, 1778, Mary Hays enlisted to serve with Captain Francis Proctor’s company in the Pennsylvania Artillery. On the hot day of battle, soldiers fought heat exhaustion and dehydration. Mary Hays repeatedly brought water to thirsty soldiers on the battlefield from a nearby spring until her husband was wounded. She then took his place at the cannon and continued firing on the British. Legend has it that George Washington promoted this courageous woman who served on the battlefield to “Sergeant Molly,” a noncommissioned officer.⁴

Almost four decades later, the young United States found itself again at war with Great Britain. The conflict over trade and control of the world’s oceans led to battles at sea and on the home front. Again, women played an integral role in the war. Born in Philadelphia in 1776, Mary Young learned the flag-making trade from her mother during the Revolutionary War. Her family moved to Baltimore when she was a child. At age nineteen, she married John Pickersgill, and they returned to Philadelphia until his death. Mary moved back to Baltimore in 1807 with her daughter and widowed mother. She became a successful Baltimore businesswoman and humanitarian, setting up a shop designing, sewing, and selling signal and house flags for the US Army, US Navy, and other merchant ships. As Fort McHenry prepared for war, Major George Armistead commissioned Pickersgill to sew a flag “so large that the British will have no difficulty seeing it from a distance.”⁵ In six weeks, Pickersgill—with the help of her daughter, two nieces, and two enslaved African Americans—hand-sewed the 30x40 foot garrison flag from 400 yards of fabric. A year later, as the battle raged in Baltimore from September 12–14, 1814, Frances Scott Key saw the flag flying over the fort while being held captive on a British ship, inspiring the poet to compose “The Star Spangled Banner,” a poem that, later when set to music, became the United States’ national anthem. The flag is displayed at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History.⁶ Mary Pickersgill’s home (*The Star Spangled Banner Flag House and 1812 Museum*) in Baltimore, a National Historic Landmark, is open for tours.

Seeking a More Perfect Union

A nation's identity is defined by what its citizens and leaders have done and what they aspire to achieve. Their actions shape other countries' perceptions of us—good or bad. As a nation founded on principles, with ultimate power placed in the hands of its people, America represents a country constantly seeking “a more perfect union,” as articulated in the US Constitution. The *National Constitution Center* in Philadelphia presents how our Founding Fathers created a revolutionary framework for government in 1787 that unified the states under a common system of law while addressing issues of federalism and representation, culminating in the Bill of Rights, which still resonates today (see textbox 1.1 below).⁷ These foundational documents set a course for government, business, civic institutions, and citizens to define and sometimes reset the country in its quest for a more perfect union. Some ideals take decades or centuries to achieve; others are aspirational concepts we still desire.

1.1: US Bill of Rights

Initially proposed as twelve amendments to the Constitution on September 25, 1789, and ratified by the First Continental Congress on December 15, 1791, the US Bill of Rights further prevents the misconstruction or abuse of powers and “extends the ground of public confidence in the Government.”¹

¹ National Archives. “The Bill of Rights: A Transcription.” Accessed August 22, 2024. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript>

Despite the affirmation that “all men are created equal” in the Declaration of Independence's preamble, the US Constitution acknowledged the institution of slavery at the end of the American Revolutionary War when it counted three out of every five enslaved people to calculate a state's total population for taxation and representation in Congress.⁸ (This was a compromise between Northern states desiring to exclude enslaved people and Southern states who wanted to count all enslaved people.) As America grew and became more diverse, the country's ideals were often tested, refined, expanded, or corrected to affirm the meaning of equality and justice for all.

Abolitionists across the Union sought to eradicate slavery in America—some by any means available. One of the most violent plots was John Brown's raid on the federal armory in Harper's Ferry on October 16, 1859, to steal rifles and arm the enslaved in the area. During the raid, Brown and his army of twenty-one met resistance from the local militia and the US Marines, and barricaded themselves in the fire house for protection. An innocent bystander, Hayward Shepherd (a free Black man working with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad), was the first man killed during the raid. Most of Brown's men, including his two sons, were killed or

captured. The seriously wounded Brown stood trial and was found guilty of murder, inciting insurrection of enslaved persons and treason against the state of Virginia (now West Virginia). Widely denounced for his use of violence, Brown was hanged on December 2, 1859. The death of innocent citizens marred Brown's vision of ending slavery and divided the nation over his actions.⁹ You can visit John Brown's fort (a guard and fire engine house built in 1848, as shown in image 1.3 below, where he and his followers barricaded themselves at **Harpers Ferry National Historical Park**, and learn more about the pivotal events that shaped the country.¹⁰

When Confederates fired on the US garrison of **Fort Sumter** in Charleston, South Carolina, in April 1861, the conflict to redefine who is an American began.¹¹ Bloody battles ensued where citizens, sometimes brothers, fought each other over the institution of slavery. Three years into the war, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation declaring "that all persons held as slaves within the rebellious states are, and henceforward shall be free" on January 1, 1863.¹² While a pivotal moment in defining equal rights, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address on November 19 spoke of how the nation's concept of liberty and the proposition that all men are created equal would continue to be tested.¹³

Resistance toward this "more perfect union" continues today. Our conflicted history and contemporary issues illustrate the struggles necessary to overcome challenges and move forward. Sometimes, religious freedom served as an impetus for leaving a homeland (as described in textbox 1.2). Despite setbacks, the United States continues to attract immigrants seeking unique cultural and economic opportunities. In 2024, America had more than 50 million foreign-born



Image 1.3 John Brown's Fort was originally a guard and fire engine house and was built in 1848—Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Source: Getty Images/traveler1116.

residents, and continues to attract new immigrants, demonstrating that the nation appeals to many individuals around the globe searching for a new beginning.¹⁴

1.2: Seeking Religious Freedom

The quest for religious freedom galvanized some people to immigrate to America. The opportunity to worship at will, a practice often denied in other countries, made the United States an attractive new home. Early settlers built churches, synagogues, cathedrals, missions, and temples in their American hometowns to reflect their religious diversity. As more immigrants arrived from other nations with different religious practices, new structures were erected for the congregants. The structures often doubled as schools and community centers.

- The Old Ship Church, known as the First Church in Hingham, Massachusetts, is a Puritan meeting house that has been in continuous use since 1681.
- The Third Haven Meeting House in Talbot County, Maryland, built in 1682, is considered the oldest-surviving Friends (Quaker) meeting house in the country.
- Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, is the oldest synagogue building in the country (dedicated in 1763).
- The African Meeting House in Boston, Massachusetts, built mostly by African American artists in 1806, makes it the oldest African American church in America.
- The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., is the largest Catholic church building in the United States and one of the largest in the world.

From the US Religious Census 2020, the Hartford Institute for Religion Research estimates that there are roughly 370,000 religious congregations in the United States today. Approximately 332,000 are Protestant and other Christian churches, 23,000 are Catholic and Orthodox churches, and about 15,000 are religious congregations or communities of other faiths.¹

¹Hartford Institute for Religion Research. "Fast Facts on American Religion."
Accessed March 1, 2025. <https://hirr.hartfordinternational.edu/fast-facts-on-american-religion/>

Americans have persevered through economic depressions and societal change, human and civil rights battles, and global wars to invent life-changing products, create new art forms, and console each other during natural and man-made disasters. The people and places associated with the nation's evolution exemplify its complex history, the pivotal circumstances forcing change, and the creative solutions implemented to provide a transformative future.

Inspiring Activists

While historians have written books about our country's notable business and political leaders, America's complicated story is perhaps best told through the actions of ordinary and extraordinary individuals who effected change with exceptional impact. People who overcame

adversity and prejudice to champion the fair treatment of others. Citizens who cared enough about neighbors and humanitarian causes to become volunteers, philanthropists, and civic leaders. Men and women who chose to serve and fight to protect the liberties of America's past, current, and future generations of citizens. The American spirit is embodied in the individual and collective desire to solve problems, seek solutions, and create positive change for all.

To escape bondage, many formerly enslaved individuals—such as Harriet Tubman—worked with abolitionists to help Freedom Seekers. Born Araminta Ross around 1822 in Dorchester County, Maryland, the enslaved girl worked as a field hand and house servant before marrying John Tubman, a free Black man, in 1844. She adopted her mother's name, Harriet, and, in 1849, ran north to freedom in Philadelphia.¹⁵ Seeking to assist other enslaved persons, Tubman used disguises, knowledge of the terrain, and a network of sympathizers to guide seventy people on their journey to freedom.¹⁶ Today, significant sites associated with *Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad* and routes to freedom are mapped from her birthplace in Church Creek, Maryland, to New York and Canada to encourage further education and exploration. Tubman's home in Auburn, New York (the *Harriet Tubman National Historical Park*, promoted in image 1.4 below), shares little-known stories about her heroism and social activism during the Civil War and the women's suffrage movement.

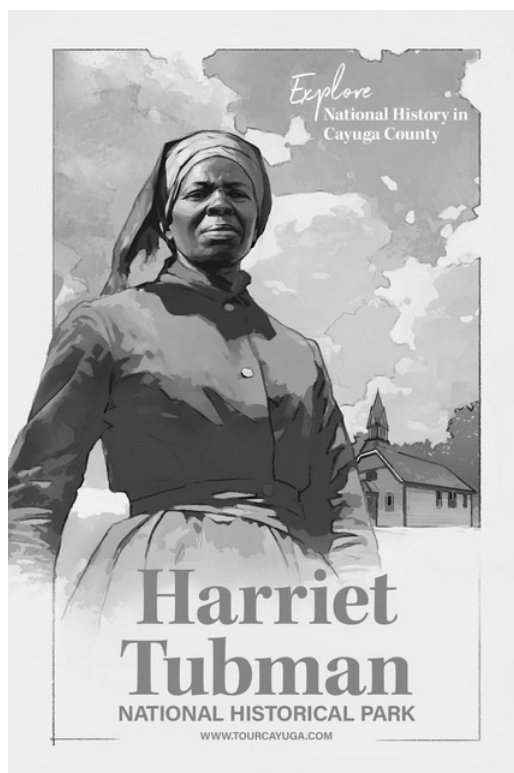


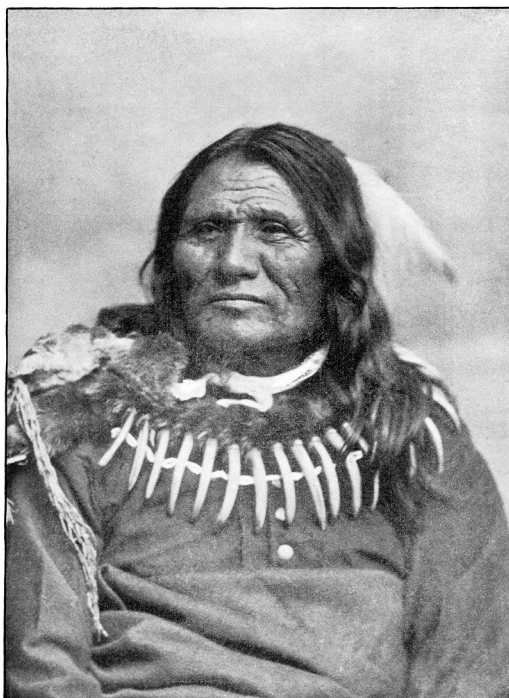
Image 1.4 Poster inviting visitors to Harriet Tubman's hometown of Auburn, New York. Source: Cayuga County Office of Tourism/David Owens Illustration.

Susan B. Anthony shared Tubman's desire for equal rights and helped lead the nation's suffrage movement. Initially involved in the temperance movement to cease the production and sale of alcohol, she shifted her focus to women's rights when denied a chance to speak at an 1853 state convention of the Sons of Temperance in Albany (New York) because of her gender.¹⁷ As a member of the teachers' union in New York, she learned that male teachers received higher pay (a monthly salary of \$10) while female teachers earned only \$2.50 a month. Her experience, enhanced by her upbringing as a Quaker and abolition activist, inspired Anthony to dedicate her life's work to gender equality.¹⁸

In 1851, she met the architect of the women's movement, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who authored the "Declaration of Sentiments" calling for social and legal changes to elevate women in society.¹⁹ Anthony frequently spoke at rallies to encourage voting rights for women.²⁰ With Stanton, she organized the National Women Suffrage Association and served as its president. Her home in Rochester, New York, now the **National Susan B. Anthony Museum & House**, served as its headquarters; it is also where Anthony was arrested for voting in 1872 and where she died in 1906.²¹ Her quest for women's equality was realized with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, ratified on August 18, 1920, stating that "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."²²

As women sought the right to vote, Native Americans sought the right to keep their tribal lands. As one of the largest Eastern tribes, the Cherokee Nation faced much pressure to give up their homeland. On May 28, 1830, Congress passed, and President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, beginning the forced relocation of five Native American tribes—the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, the Creek, and the Seminole—from their ancestral homelands east of the Mississippi River to reservations in the Great Plains.²³ In 1836, the Cherokee Nation created an official protest petition to the illegal signing of the Treaty of New Echota in Georgia.²⁴ Despite efforts by Principal Chief John Ross and others protesting removal, the US government moved in troops to force the Cherokee from their tribal homelands.²⁵ Several places in Cherokee, North Carolina, provide educational experiences about the history of the Cherokee, their forced migration along the "Trail of Tears," and the reclaiming of the tribe's homeland, culture, and heritage. Attend a performance of the historical drama, *Unto These Hills*, visit the Oconaluftee Indian Village, or explore the **Museum of the Cherokee People** to learn about the tribe, past and present.²⁶

The relocation of Native tribes also banished the Ponca from their tribal lands in Nebraska to reservation land in Oklahoma, a journey that killed about a third of the tribe. Ma-chu-nah-zah, the Ponca Chief known as Standing Bear (see image 1.5), lost both a son and a daughter during the relocation journey. He and a small band of Poncas elected to return to their native lands, defying a federal order.²⁷ After being detained, Chief Standing Bear persuaded a federal US judge in 1879 to recognize Native Americans as persons with the right to sue for their freedom.²⁸ Unfortunately, decades of cultural assimilation programs, discriminatory practices, and the loss



STANDING BEAR.

Image 1.5 *Halftone print of Standing Bear, Ponca chief, wearing a bear claw necklace. Source: Getty Images/Nnehring.*

of tribes further marginalized Native Americans. One long-overdue course of action is the Ponca Restoration Act of October 1990, which federally recognizes the tribe and allows members to receive federal benefits. This restoration reverses the tribe's termination twenty-five years earlier in 1965.²⁹

You can learn more about the heroic actions of Chief Standing Bear at the ***Ponca Museum and Library*** in Niobrara, Nebraska. More than 100 tribal museums across the continent share information about their culture, US appropriation and forced assimilation, and efforts to reclaim their native lands, languages, and traditions. The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. (part of the Smithsonian Institution), represents the nation's first national museum of Native American heritage and culture.

As Native Americans continue to fight for recognition and respect as the country's original inhabitants, African Americans continue to seek equal rights and opportunities. A Morehouse College and Boston University graduate, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. encouraged nonviolent demonstrations, such as bus and lunch counter boycotts, to champion the rights of African Americans. Between 1957 and 1968, he organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to collaborate on civil rights campaigns, worked with the National Association for the Advancement



Image 1.6 *National Civil Rights Museum located in the old Lorraine Motel, site of the Martin Luther King, Jr. assassination, in Memphis, Tennessee, including the balcony on which he was shot preserved as it was on that date. Source: Getty Images/karenfoleyphotography.*

of Colored People (NAACP) to launch the Voter Education Project,³⁰ wrote five landmark books, and spoke over 2,500 times about racial injustice and the need for change. One of his most inspirational orations followed a peaceful March on Washington, D.C., for Jobs and Freedom. His iconic “I Have a Dream” speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial before a crowd of 250,000 advocated for human and civil rights, inspiring generations of Americans to serve each other and seek justice for all. Upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 at age thirty-five, Dr. King announced that he would give the prize money of \$54,123 to further the Civil Rights Movement.³¹

Four years later while in Memphis to lead a protest march in support of striking garbage workers, Dr. King was assassinated. *The National Civil Rights Museum* at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis memorializes this notable American’s life and accomplishments (see image 1.6 above).³² Cities across the United States pay tribute to this Civil and Human Rights leader with statues, monuments, and named streets. A national memorial in Washington, D.C., and a national holiday respect the ideals of this transformational American. His home and Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where he was pastor, are interpreted as part of the *Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park* in Atlanta, Georgia.³³

The Fight for Worker’s Rights

As America advanced economically, particularly with growth in industry and manufacturing during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the need for workers escalated.

Immigrants came to the country seeking employment opportunities and the American dream of future prosperity. Some citizens found this prosperity through savvy business acumen, inventions, and innovations, many of which are described in the next chapter. These entrepreneurs laid the foundation for profitability, expansion, and improvements.

Others found grueling work in unsafe conditions. During the Industrial Revolution, women, children, and immigrant workers labored long hours under often-hazardous conditions. Paterson, New Jersey, was the center of silk fabric production in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As tensions between labor and management increased across the country, one of the largest and longest strikes in American history occurred in 1913. Over 20,000 mill workers walked off the job, effectively shutting down production for five months.³⁴ The strikers met at the home of Italian immigrant and silk mill worker Pietro Botto and his wife, Maria, to formalize their demands for safer working conditions, an end to child labor, and an eight-hour day (see image 1.7 below). The Botto's 1908 Victorian home is now the **American Labor Museum**, a National Historic Landmark in Haledon, New Jersey, with tours and exhibits about the strike and its impact on worker rights and reforms.³⁵

Factory workers represented only one group of America's disenchanted labor force at the turn of the twentieth century. A wage dispute led to the 163-day coal strike of 1902 in Pennsylvania's anthracite fields near Scranton. The strike also represented a turning point in US policy when the federal government, for the first time, participated in the labor settlement.³⁶



Image 1.7 Strike meeting at the Botto House in 1913. Source: American Labor Museum.

Learn more about this pivotal labor crisis at the ***Pennsylvania Anthracite Heritage Museum*** in Scranton.

A decade later, coal miners in West Virginia attempted to organize under the United Mine Workers. With one of the highest fatality rates among industrial workers and some of the weakest safety laws in the country, West Virginia miners also suffered from low wages and poor work conditions. The struggle to unionize met with resistance, and the “West Virginia Mine Wars” erupted. In August 1921, thousands of pro-union miners marched 60 miles from Marmet to Mingo County, West Virginia, to free striking miners jailed when the governor declared martial law. Crossing over Blair Mountain on their way, the marchers met up with anti-union sheriff Don Chafin and his citizen army. The largest pitched battle in the history of the US labor movement also became the largest insurrection on US soil since the American Civil War. President Warren G. Harding called in the army to end the Battle of Blair Mountain. Unfortunately, while the fighting ended, the miners’ struggles continued. In 1922, the State of West Virginia indicted over 500 pro-union marchers on charges of treason, murder, accessory to murder, and conspiracy to commit murder. The trials of individual miners took place at the Jefferson County Courthouse (the same Courthouse for abolitionist John Brown’s trial), some 300 miles away from Mingo.

Media coverage of the first trial for defendant Bill Blizzard exposed the collusion between coal operators and state officials to prevent workers from organizing a union. Realizing that workers fighting for their rights could be found guilty of treason sent shock waves through the entire labor movement. The United Mine Workers of America’s efforts stalled but survived and eventually strengthened with the help of the New Deal. The ***West Virginia Mine Wars Museum*** in Mingo provides additional information about the people involved in the conflict and the impact of the Mine Wars on industry in America.

In the 1970s, César E. Chávez led a farmworker movement to improve their working conditions and wages. Losing the family farm at age eleven (during the Great Depression) profoundly impacted this first-generation American, as he, his parents, and his four siblings were forced to travel across California to find work as laborers in the agricultural fields, orchards, and vineyards.³⁷ After eighth grade, Chávez became a full-time migrant worker to help support his family. With his first-hand knowledge of the hardships and injustices of farm workers, Chávez grew the United Farm Workers of America into a powerful voice for the poor and disenfranchised. Their efforts resulted in the passage of California’s Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975, the first law in the US recognizing migrant workers’ collective bargaining rights. This visionary labor rights leader is memorialized at the ***César E. Chávez National Monument*** in Keene, California. A visitor’s center, bookstore, and memorial garden where Chávez is buried pay tribute to his work and legacy.

Flashpoints for Change

Fire broke out on the eighth floor of the Asch Building, a ten-story skyscraper, in Manhattan, New York, on March 25, 1911. A locked exit door and inoperable elevators hindered escape for workers at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory—mostly Italian and Jewish immigrant girls and women aged fourteen to forty-three.³⁸ Firefighters responded quickly. Unfortunately, a ladder erected to rescue workers on the upper three floors only reached the sixth floor. To escape the flames, fifty-eight women jumped from windows, and thirty-six threw themselves down elevator shafts. After the fire was extinguished, 146 had died.³⁹ The 1911 *Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Memorial* pays tribute to lives lost at the worst workplace disaster to occur in New York City until the collapse of the Twin Towers ninety years later. The memorial includes the names of all those who perished in the fire written in English, Italian, and Yiddish to honor the primary languages spoken at the factory at the time.⁴⁰ The fire also set in motion efforts to improve workplace safety. One of the witnesses to the tragic factory fire, Frances Perkins, began a lifetime of advocacy for workers' rights. Appointed executive secretary for the newly created Committee of Safety for the City of New York, Perkins identified ways to improve fire safety at more than 200 factories. The Committee's work resulted in new laws requiring better exits, fire extinguishers, alarms, and sprinkler systems.⁴¹

The Stock Market crash of 1929 plummeted the nation into the Great Depression, which lasted through 1941. This catastrophic economic event was further exacerbated by the impact of drought and dust storms on agriculture, additional banking panics in 1930 and 1931, and the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 suppressing world trade. In 1933, over 12.8 million people—one-quarter of the nation's total workforce—were unemployed.⁴² John Steinbeck's Pulitzer Prize-winning epic, *The Grapes of Wrath*, chronicled the devastating poverty and hardships endured by many Americans. Newly elected president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, promised swift action and affirming policies to stimulate the economy and foster hope.⁴³ He tapped Frances Perkins (see image 1.8) as his secretary of labor, the first woman to serve as a cabinet secretary, to initiate sweeping reforms and redefine the role of government. Perkins is credited as the driving force behind Roosevelt's "New Deal" of Social Security, a forty-hour work week, and other labor policies that helped create the modern middle class and offer a safety net for citizens. You can learn more about this human rights leader's inspirations and achievements at the *Frances Perkins Homestead* in Newcastle, Maine.⁴⁴

The demand for civil rights escalated in the decades following Reconstruction. During the "Jim Crow" era beginning in 1877, laws enacted in Southern and border states enforced racial segregation in schools and public transportation. Segregation soon expanded to parks,



Image 1.8 *Frances Perkins, first female secretary of labor. Source: Frances Perkins Center.*

cemeteries, theaters, and restaurants to prevent contact between races. The US Supreme Court's 1896 "separate but equal" decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* affirmed this principle. However, the Supreme Court finally reversed this decision fifty-eight years later in the 1954 case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, declaring segregation in public schools unconstitutional. On September 3, 1957, nine teenagers tested this landmark legislation as they walked into the Little Rock Central High School but were turned away by the Arkansas National Guard. After another failed attempt to enter the school, President Dwight D. Eisenhower intervened. He ordered the US Army's 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock and federalized the Arkansas National Guard to escort the "Little Rock Nine" to their first day of school on September 25, 1957. Despite being subjected to verbal and physical attacks, senior Ernest Green persevered to become the first African American to graduate from Central High School in May 1958.⁴⁵ Green continued his education at Michigan State University, receiving bachelor's and Master of Science degrees. His professional career included service as Assistant secretary of labor for Employment and Training in President Jimmy Carter's administration. His remarkable story of endurance, perseverance, and the end of legal segregation is one of many recounted at the ***Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site*** in Little Rock, Arkansas (see image 1.9).



Image 1.9 *Central High School had a pivotal role in the American Civil Rights Movement whereby segregation between Black and white students was fought by “The Little Rock Nine in 1957. Source: Getty Images/danibeder.*

This event and activist protests, such as Rosa Parks’ arrest in December 1955 for refusing to surrender her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus to a white passenger, fueled the Civil Rights Movement.⁴⁶ The Bloody Sunday March, led by activist Hosea Williams and future Congressman John Lewis across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, on March 7, 1965, raised national consciousness and support from activists, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens to pass federal legislation granting equal rights to African Americans. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 became two of the most significant pieces of legislation since Reconstruction, outlawing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

The 1960s were a turbulent time in America. As the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, protests against the Vietnam War escalated. In May 1966, students at the University of Wisconsin staged the first “sit-in,” peacefully occupying an administration building to protest America’s role in the war. The following April, Martin Luther King, Jr. denounced the war during a speech in New York.⁴⁷ During the “Vietnam Summer” of 1967, anti-war protests occurred in communities across the country. That October, the Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam organized the first national protest against the war in Washington, D.C.⁴⁸ The determined crowd of 35,000 marched toward the Pentagon, where a full-scale riot erupted and 682 people were arrested.⁴⁹ During an anti-war protest on the campus of Kent State University on May 4, 1970, members of the Ohio National Guard fatally shot four and wounded nine other students. The event triggered a nationwide student strike and escalated tension over the US involvement in the Vietnam War.⁵⁰ The divisive debate about the war raged for another seven years until the conflict officially ended in April 1975.⁵¹

Veterans returning from Vietnam often encountered hostility, a lack of GI benefits and medical assistance, and job and housing discrimination.⁵² The dedication of the **Vietnam Veterans Memorial** in Washington, D.C., inscribed with the names of the 58,200 servicemen and women who died in the war, began the process of recognition and healing for these veterans and their families.⁵³ The Three Servicemen statue and flagstaff keep watch over the V-shaped black granite wall to honor those who fought and returned from the war. A subsequent memorial honoring women who served in Vietnam was dedicated in 1993. Today, it is the most visited memorial on the National Mall.⁵⁴ It joins other national memorials to honor the sacrifice and service of men and women in the world wars and other US military conflicts. See Chapter 12 for more information on some of the most iconic memorials in our nation's capital.

Despite the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and other subsequent legislation, citizens were not always protected from prejudice. In the 1960s, living openly as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) person often violated local laws, rules, or policies. The first-ever picket for gay rights took place outside the White House in April 1965.⁵⁵ Yet a seminal police raid at Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York's Greenwich Village, changed the trajectory of equal rights for the LGBTQ community. Up to that time, New York City enforced strict and harsh regulations against homosexual activities. Since serving alcohol to homosexuals was prohibited, organized crime in New York established private clubs for gay patrons. While prior police raids resulted in arrests and public humiliation, the raid on June 28, 1969, led to a series of uprisings over six days to protest against discrimination, brutality, and harassment of the LGBTQ community.⁵⁶ Nightly demonstrations at Christopher Park and the surrounding neighborhood drew crowds and media attention, empowering the gay rights movement. The US Department of the Interior designated the Stonewall Inn as a National Historic Landmark in 2016. The **Stonewall National Monument** Visitor Center in New York, New York, is admission-free and serves as an educational resource with engaging programs, including annual Gay Pride parades. A public park nearby recognizes the site of the riots (see image 1.10).

Similarly, Americans with disabilities faced negative stereotypes and restrictions in education, employment, housing, transportation, and access. Activists lobbied for self-determination in ways similar to the Civil Rights movement. Pivotal moments, such as the "504 Sit-In" (described in textbox 1.3) brought attention to the discriminatory practices. Parents demanded that their children be removed from institutions and asylums to have educational opportunities equal to those afforded nondisabled students. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protected the civil rights of people with disabilities.⁵⁷ However, the nondiscrimination law did not cover many aspects of American life.



Image 1.10 *A public park dedicated near the Stonewall Inn, site of the 1969 riots in New York City that began the LGBTQ rights movement. Source: Getty Image/Warren Eisenberg.*

1.3: The 504 Sit-In

In April 1977, Judith Heumann (regarded as “the mother” of the Disability Rights Movement) led a group of over 120 disability advocates and activists to occupy the federal office of the Health, Education, and Welfare agency in San Francisco to protest Secretary Joseph A. Califano, Jr.’s refusal to sign regulations related to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. After twenty-five days, Secretary Califano signed the regulations into effect, making it illegal for any public entity receiving federal funds to discriminate because of a disability. The takeover event is the longest occupation of a federal office by protestors in US history. In 2019, a Disability Rights Movement history timeline was installed outdoors at Philadelphia’s City Hall Courtyard and indoors at the Parkway Central Library.¹

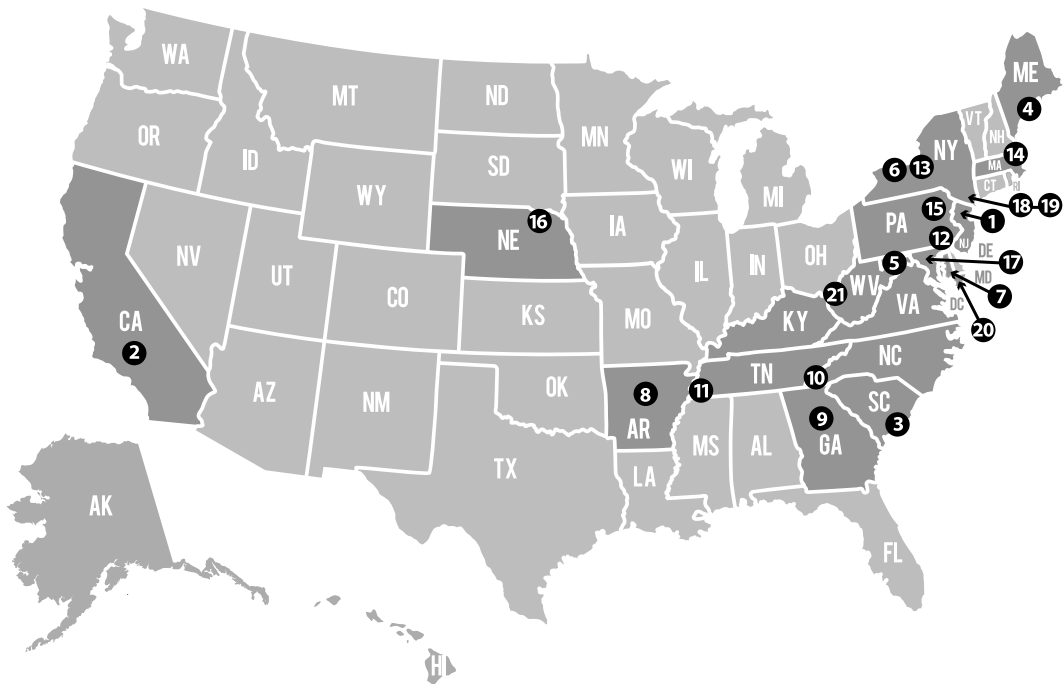
¹ Temple University. Disability Rights Timeline, Institute on Disabilities, downloaded on April 1, 2025. <https://disabilities.temple.edu/resources/disability-rights-timeline>

To broaden civil liberties and provide for full opportunities and empowerment, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990 as the world’s first comprehensive law for people with disabilities.⁵⁸ Today, accessibility has expanded throughout systems and places across the country, making it easier to travel across America and experience its unique places. The ADA has been a model for other countries to open and adapt accessibility for all. The National Museum of

American History and the National Archives in Washington, D.C., display educational exhibits about this landmark legislation and its global impact.⁵⁹

Roadmap for the Future

The American spirit and can-do attitude resurface when faced with significant obstacles, demonstrating how every citizen can make a difference in the country and the world. The aspirational ideals set forth by imperfect Founding Fathers challenge each citizen to realize the self-truths outlined in the Declaration of Independence: “All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”⁶⁰ The Bill of Rights and subsequent Amendments to the Constitution affirm that citizens can address unforeseen issues that arise and solve unanticipated conflicts.



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| 1 (The) American Labor Museum (1908 Botto House) | Haledon, NJ |
| 2 César E. Chávez National Monument | Keene, CA |
| 3 Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Park | Sullivan's Island, SC |
| 4 (The) Frances Perkins Homestead National Historic Landmark | Newcastle, ME |
| 5 Harpers Ferry National Historical Park | Harpers Ferry, WV |
| 6 Harriet Tubman National Historical Park | Auburn, NY |
| 7 Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center | Church Creek, MD |
| 8 Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site | Little Rock, AR |
| 9 Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park | Atlanta, GA |
| 10 Museum of the Cherokee People | Cherokee, NC |
| 11 (The) National Civil Rights Museum | Memphis, TN |
| 12 National Constitution Center | Philadelphia, PA |
| 13 National Susan B. Anthony Museum & House | Rochester, NY |
| 14 Paul Revere House | Boston, MA |
| 15 Pennsylvania Anthracite Heritage Museum | Scranton, PA |
| 16 Ponca Tribal Museum & Library | Niobrara, NE |
| 17 Star-Spangled Banner Flag House and 1812 Museum | Baltimore, MD |
| 18 Stonewall National Monument | New York, NY |
| 19 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Memorial | New York, NY |
| 20 Vietnam Veterans Memorial | Washington, DC |
| 21 (The) West Virginia Mine Wars Museum | Matewan, WV |



Image 2.1 *Native American Cliff Dwellings at Mesa Verde National Park, a World Heritage Site.*
Source: Getty Images/Elementalimaging.