



FAKULTA POLITICKÝCH VIED A MEDZINÁRODNÝCH VZŤAHOV  
UNIVERZITA MATEJA BELA V BANSKEJ BYSTRICI

2017  
HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES



**Martina Benčeková**



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**Martina BENČEKOVÁ**

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## **History of the United States**

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## **Introduction**

This textbook arises from a long-term concern with the teaching of the history of the United States of America. In particular we are concerned with the political aspects of the country's evolution. It is predominantly intended for the students of international relations, security studies, and political science at a university level, but it can be used as a source of information for everybody interested in political history of the United States.

The level of this book presupposes an advanced level of language competence and common vocabulary. The main goal of the book consists of several objectives:

- to develop analytical reading skills and critical thinking approach;
- to enrich the students' knowledge on fundamental issues in political history of the country;
- to help the students with their ability of developing the arguments for discussion;
- to improve their linguistic skills in lexicology, terminology and morphology in accordance with academic knowledge.

The textbook is divided into six chapters. Each chapter deals with specific historical issues in the country's development, following a chronological order, from the colonial times to the twentieth century. Each chapter contains the same sections:

- Text
- The Academic Word List
- Section A. Comprehension check
- Section B. Language work
- Section C. Topics for discussion

The texts are designed as self-learning materials with a minimum need of teacher's assistance, aimed to develop students' individual strategies for learning. The texts are of an adequate extent and they focus on the milestones of the political history of the United States, including the important economic, social and international aspects. As the textbook is primarily aimed at the students of international relations and political science, the separate chapter on foreign policy is included. The texts are intended to provide the students with appropriate amount of information to enlarge their information of historical issues, events and personalities in a broad context. The chapters include an academic word list to understand the topic and a comprehension check to ensure the student's mastering the knowledge.

Section B "Language work" includes variety of tasks in lexicology, terminology and several morphological aspects of English language on the academic level. The included activities are related to the topics and issues of the chapter and they are aimed at the further development of students' language skills.

The final Section C gives the students many topics for discussion. It is aimed to develop the ability of university students to develop their critical thinking and giving the appropriate arguments for their analyses. Some of them can be used as a basis for essay training.

The aim of the author is to provide the students of international relations, security studies, and political science with a source of adequate knowledge on historical background of one the most important players on the international political scene, together with a complex development of language skills within the academic texts.

# Chapter 1

## THE COLONIAL PERIOD

### **Key topics of this chapter**

*The Discovery of America*

*British colonization*

*The South, Middle and New England colonies*

*British colonial government*

### **The Discovery of America**

The first Europeans appeared in the New World around 1000 AD, when the Vikings sailed from the British Isles to Greenland. They established a colony named Vineland in Newfoundland, but it was not a permanent settlement. The Vikings never returned to America. Between 1000 and 1650 a series of movements and events occurred in Europe that provided the impulse for the exploration and subsequent colonization of America - the Protestant reformation, the Renaissance, centralized political power of large states, and the vivid trade with the East. The end of Middle Ages was marked by the political centralization that finally ended much of the fighting among rival noble families and regions. Portugal, Spain, France, and England were transformed from small territories into nation states with the monarchs who could direct and finance overseas exploration. At the same time, technological innovations in navigation and shipbuilding enabled the new era of colonisation. Faster and safe ships, together with the invention of navigational devices such as the astrolabe and sextant made extended voyages possible.

In August 1492, Columbus sailed west with his three ships - Niña, Pinta, and Santa María, in search for a new route to India. After ten-week voyage he sighted an island in the Bahamas. Subsequent explorations by other explorers persuaded most Europeans that Columbus had discovered a “New World”. Huge number of Spanish expeditions followed. Juan Ponce de León explored the coasts of Florida in 1513; Vasco Núñez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama and discovered the Pacific Ocean in the same year. On long-lasting expedition, Ferdinand Magellan sailed around the tip of South America, across the Pacific to the Philippines, through the Indian Ocean, and back to Europe. The next expedition was headed by Hernando Cortés, who led a small army against the Aztec Empire of Mexico. Cortés took control of the Aztecs’ extraordinary gold and silver mines, when he completed the conquest in 1521. Ten years later, an expedition under Francisco Pizarro conquered the Inca Empire of Peru. In 1535 Cabeza de Vaca explored the North American Southwest, adding that region to Spain’s New World empire. A few years later (1539-1542) Francisco Vásquez de Coronado discovered the Grand Canyon and Hernando de Soto explored south-eastern North America from Florida to the Mississippi River. Those expeditions led directly to Spain’s rise as the wealthiest and most powerful European nation in the 16th century. By 1650 Spanish empire was complete and fleets of ships were carrying the plunder back to Spain, constantly being attacked by British pirates.

The colonization of New World by English people started in 1497, when Henry VII sponsored three expeditions conducted by **John Cabot** (Italian: Giovanni Caboto). He explored a part of Newfoundland and reported an abundance of fish. King Henry VII continued to support exploration from Bristol; he sponsored Hugh Eliot, Robert Thorne and Sebastian Cabot (one of Cabot’s sons) for following explorations. Until Queen Elizabeth’s reign, the English showed little interest in exploration, focusing rather on their European trade. By the mid-sixteenth century England had recognized the advantages of

trade with the East. As a result, the English merchants enlisted Martin Frobisher in 1560 to search for a northwest passage to India. Between 1576 and 1578 Frobisher together with John Davis explored along the Atlantic coast. Subsequently, Queen Elizabeth granted charters to Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Sir Walter Raleigh to accelerate the colonization of America. Gilbert headed two expeditions to the New World, and Raleigh explored a territory he gave the name Virginia to after Elizabeth, the “Virgin Queen”. Later, he sponsored a second voyage in 1585 to explore the Chesapeake Bay region.

### **British colonization**

The motivation of the British colonists to come and settle down in America can be divided into economic, religious, social and political motives. **Economic** reasons were surely the most effective in promoting colonization. Among these was the accumulation of surplus capital and the profit motive. Wealthy businessmen sought opportunities to invest their money. Joint-stock companies sold shares of stock to ventures and enabled them to share the great expense and risk of founding colonies as business enterprises. The prevailing economic theory of mercantilism stressed the need of a nation to accumulate precious metals – the English hoped to find gold in the colonies. Thus, England wished to secure vital raw materials from her colonies instead of paying precious coin to other countries. The need for markets for England’s surplus manufacturing argued for the establishment of captured markets in the form of colonies. Intense of individual colonists many were dominated the simple desire to own land, in scarce supply in Europe, and enjoy a better standard of living.

**Religious** motives forced a large group of English men to find the place to follow their own consciences in religious matters. The Protestant Reformation gave rise to reformed churches who wanted to purify the hierarchy

and customs of the traditional Church instead of conforming to the religious uniformity required by the Anglican Church. Non-conforming religious sects were persecuted as undermining the authority of the king.

There were also several **social** and **political** aspects that played the role in the colonization process. The enclosure movement, taking land out of cultivation and converting it into pastureland for sheep, was creating a surplus population. Sheep rising, more profitable than traditional agriculture, required less labourers. The new lands in America gave these unemployed farmers a place to work. Also, a surplus was occurring in the upper-classes as second and third born sons were looking for work since England was not at war. Less numerous was a desire for adventure – opportunity and new experiences – that moved several people to go to America. There were some political aspects that must be taken into consideration, too. Related to a desire for religious freedom was the wish of some opposed to the monarchy for a greater degree of political freedom than the citizens had in England. And from an international point of view - the English government wanted to weaken Spain by establishing military and naval domination overseas.

### **The South, Middle and New England colonies**

England faced turbulent economic changes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Trade with wool increased its importance, and many landowners were converting fields into pastures for sheep. This led to a food shortage, and many agricultural workers lost their jobs. The competition of European nations to acquire as many colonies as they could resulted into the fact that the English colonies in North America were treated as business ventures. They functioned as an outlet for England's redundant inhabitants and (mostly in New England) place of more religious freedom than in England, but their primary purpose was to provide the profit for sponsors.

### *The first settlements*

The first English settlement in North America was established in 1587, when a group of colonists (91 men, 17 women and nine children) led by Sir Walter Raleigh settled on the island of Roanoke. Mysteriously, by 1590 the Roanoke colony had disappeared entirely. Until today, there are no confirmed findings concerning what had happened to its inhabitants. In 1606, King James I divided the Atlantic shoreline in two parts, giving the southern half to the **Virginia Company** (previously the London Company) and the northern half to the **Plymouth Company**. The Virginia Company was a joint-stock company chartered to establish the colonies in North America. Such a venture allowed the Crown to use the benefits of colonization, such as natural resources, new markets for English goods, race against the Spanish. The company established a first settlement at **Jamestown** in 1607, and over the next two decades, the Crown democratized its governance and reformed its financial model by two new charters. By 1618 the company forced settlers to pay their own transport from England to the colony and then to pay the company a fee to use the land. At the very beginning, the Virginia Company sent 144 men to Virginia. They reached the Chesapeake Bay in the spring of 1607 and headed about 60 miles up the James River, where they built a settlement they gave the name Jamestown to honour King James I. The settlement became the first permanent English settlement in North America. Jamestown served as the capital of the colony of Virginia for 83 years, from 1616 until 1699.

### *The New England colonies*

The founders of the New England colonies (also referred to as the North colonies) were made up of a small group of Puritans, later called the Pilgrims, who arrived in **Plymouth** in 1620. Ten years later, a wealthy syndicate known

as the Massachusetts Bay Company sent a much larger group of Puritans to establish another Massachusetts settlement. With the help of local natives, the colonists started to practice farming, fishing and hunting, and Massachusetts prospered. Economic activities and trade of New England, Middle and Southern regions were dependent of the environment in which the colonists lived. The landscape and climate influenced the trade and economic activities of New England Colonies. In the towns along the coast, the colonists made their living fishing, whaling, and shipbuilding. Farming was difficult in New England for crops like wheat because of the poor soil but corn, pumpkins, rye, squash and beans were planted. The Northern Colonies of New England concentrated on manufacture and focused on crafts and industries such as ship building. Every of the New England Colonies elected its own legislature, but the official head of all of them was a **governor**, together with a governor's court, and a court system. The government systems used by the New England Colonies were Royal or Charter. The main difference between them was that the Royal Colonies were ruled directly by the English monarchy and the Charter ones were governed by political corporations. The religion practiced in New England was strictly Puritan and they did not tolerate any other religions. The original names of the New England Colonies were:

- the Province of New Hampshire (later New Hampshire)
- the Province of Massachusetts Bay (later Massachusetts and Maine)
- the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations (later Rhode Island and the Connecticut Colony).

### *The Middle colonies*

In 1664, King Charles II gave the territory between New England and Virginia to his brother James, the Duke of York. The English soon conquered

Dutch New Amsterdam and renamed it New York, but most of the Dutch people (as well as the Belgian Flemings and Walloons, French Huguenots, Scandinavians and Germans) stayed there. This made New York one of the most multi-cultural and prosperous colonies in the New World. In 1680, the king granted a land west of the Delaware River to a Quaker **William Penn**. Penn's North American holding became the colony of "Penn's Woods" (or Pennsylvania). People migrated there from all over Europe, attracted by religious toleration promised by Penn. Like their Puritan counterparts in New England, most of these emigrants paid their own transport to the colonies, so they were not indentured servants, and had enough money to establish their own estates. The original names of the Middle Colonies were:

- the Province of New York (later New York and Vermont),
- the Province of New Jersey (later New Jersey)
- the Province of Pennsylvania (later Pennsylvania)
- the Delaware Colony (later Delaware)

The four Middle Colonies of Colonial America consisted of a mix of both northern and southern political, economic and social features. They all had a governor, governor's court, and a court system. Government was mainly proprietary, but New York was founded as a Royal Colony. The Middle Colonies were not dominated by a single religion which led to more liberal attitudes and religious freedom - there were Quakers, Catholics, Lutherans, Jews and others. The Middle Colonies exported agricultural products and natural resources. Their economy was mostly based on farming, but they were also able to manufacture iron ore products, which were exported to England. Other industries included the production of iron ore, lumber, textiles, furs and shipbuilding.

## *The Southern Colonies*

Because of the fertile soil and warm climate, the Southern Colonies concentrated on agriculture and developed plantations exporting tobacco, cotton, corn, indigo (a purple dye), vegetables, grain, fruit and cattle. The Southern Colonies had the largest **slave** population who worked on the plantations. Some of the Southern plantations were extremely large and included the owner's house, slave quarters, dairy, blacksmith's shop, laundry, smokehouse and barns which made the plantations self-sufficient, to a large extent. The geography of the Southern Colonies that influenced the focus of the production, featured fertile soil, coastal plains, forests, long rivers and swamp areas. The warm climate made it possible to grow crops throughout the year and flat land was ideally suitable for plantations.

The Southern colonies consisted of Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. The political system was the same as the Middle and New England colonies - the Southern colonies had a governor, governor's court, and a court system. The systems of government were either royal or proprietary. The Southern Colonies were not dominated by a single religion which gave way to certain religious freedom. There were predominantly Anglicans and Baptists in the Southern region and Colonies.

### **British colonial government**

There were three forms of colonial government in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: provincial, proprietary, and charter. These governments were all subordinated to the British king in London. They all operated using the following basic principles:

- all systems of colonial government in the thirteen colonies elected their own legislature (parliament)

- all colonial government systems were democratic
- all colonial government systems had a governor, a governor's court, a court system.

Colonial government in the American colonies represented an extension of the English government. Every colonial council and council members both in America and England were established by the king of England to provide administration and management of the colonies and the king also identified all council members. The council had the authority to benefit the natural resources of the colonies with part of the profits given to the king. The executive power in the colony was held by a **governor**, who represented the Crown in the colonial government. The governor's council consisted of influential and powerful men who advised and supported the governor. An **Assembly** was elected by the inhabitants of the towns and counties. The most important political role in colonial America was in the hands of the governor, as he was the representative of the king. In order to rule the colonies from a distance a governor was appointed directly by the monarch. The principal role of the governor was to monitor the colony and to conduct the colonial administration. The governor was in charge of laws, and taxes; he made decisions which influenced the everyday life of the colony. He had the authority to appoint various government officials to help him in his political activities. He had several important powers, such as:

- the power to convene, or dissolve the legislature
- the power to veto any of the colonial laws
- the command of the militia to apply colonial government policies.

The administration of all British colonies was monitored by a **Board of Trade** in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Each colony had a paid colonial agent in London to represent its interests.

### *Royal colonies*

The royal colonies were: New York, New Hampshire, Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Massachusetts. The work of the royal government was conducted by **commissions** created by the monarch. A **governor** (and occasionally his council) was appointed by the crown. The governor represented executive powers, and had the right to call an elected assembly. The governor's council functioned as an upper house when the assembly was in session, together with an opportunity of advising the governor. **Assemblies** were made up of representatives elected by the freeholders and landowners of the region. The governor had the power of absolute veto, and could prorogue and dissolve the assembly. The main role of an assembly was to make all local laws and ordinances, ensuring that they were in accordance with the laws of England. Many of the provincial assemblies attempted to expand their powers and limit the impact of the governor and crown. The main task of the **Board of Trade** was to review the laws, with an additional veto power of legislation.

### *Proprietary colonies*

Proprietary colonies were: New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland. They were administered as royal colonies except that the governor was appointed by the lord proprietors, instead of the king. They enjoyed larger civil and religious liberties.

### *Charter colonies*

Charter colonies were: Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. The Massachusetts charter was replaced by a