



## ★ “Civil Disobedience” ★

New England writer Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was a strong supporter of individual freedom. He was arrested and spent a day in jail for refusing to pay a poll tax. He could not pay the tax, he argued, because then he would be supporting the crimes of the government, especially the war with Mexico. He later wrote in his essay “Civil Disobedience” (1849), “The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think is right.”

*Do you agree with Thoreau that the only obligation any of us has is to do what we think is right? Tell why or why not. What kind of society do you think we would have if we all held firmly to this belief?*

## ★ The Pony Express ★

William H. Russell founded the Pony Express in 1858 as a faster way to deliver mail. He planned to have a relay of horses and riders stretching across the continent. Russell found his riders by advertising for “daring young men, preferably orphans.”

*Why do you think Russell asked for “daring young men, preferably orphans”? What other kinds of jobs might this advertisement apply to?*

## ★ The Transcontinental Railroad

The final section of the transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869, ran from

Nebraska to California, and thus connected the entire United States through steel tracks.

*One historian has said that the transcontinental railroad did more than politics to bind East and West into a single nation. How do you think the railroad accomplished that?*



## ★ Western Outlaws ★

Jesse James (1847-1882) was one of many western outlaws who was hailed as a hero as much as he was condemned as a criminal. He robbed big banks and railroads, but many common people saw justice in his actions. After all, they asked, don't big banks and railroads rob us on a daily basis?

*Do you think Jesse James and other western outlaws were heroes or criminals for robbing big banks and railroads? Is robbery the best way to get back at organizations you feel are taking advantage of you? What other actions could you take?*



## ★ Lincoln's Assassination ★

John Wilkes Booth (1838–1865), a fanatical supporter of the South, assassinated President Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) while Lincoln watched a play at Ford's Theater on April 14, 1865. American poet Walt Whitman (1819–1892) went on to write the poem, "O Captain! My Captain!"

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,  
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;  
But O heart! heart! heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red,  
Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

*Who is the Captain that Whitman writes of in this poem? What is the ship? What is the prize? Based on this poem, do you think Whitman supported the Union or the Confederacy? Compose your own short poem about the Civil War and Lincoln's death.*

## ★ Reconstruction ★

The South was devastated—physically, economically, and spiritually—after the Civil War. Lincoln's plan had been to bring the rebellious states back into the Union with as little trouble for them as possible. After Lincoln's death, his successor Andrew Johnson (1808–1875), wanted to follow Lincoln's plan, but Radical Republicans wanted to make it much more difficult for the states that had seceded to rejoin the Union. The Radical Republicans were more powerful than Johnson, and had their way. They divided the South into military regions under the command of generals. They also required the states to adopt constitutions that allowed blacks to vote and to accept the Fourteenth Amendment, which extended citizenship to blacks.

*Write a paragraph in favor of moderate reconstruction and one in favor of harsher reconstruction. Which argument do you think is stronger? Defend your reasoning. Why do you think many northerners wanted to make readmission to the Union difficult for the rebellious states?*

