

The Greatest Events in American History

The Greatest Events in American History

By

Donald Elder III

and Michael F. Shaughnessy

The Greatest Events in American History

By Donald Elder III and Michael F. Shaughnessy

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2018 by Donald Elder III and Michael F. Shaughnessy

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-1409-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1409-6

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	vii
Plymouth Rock	1
The Declaration of Independence	7
The Boston Massacre	11
The Louisiana Purchase.....	17
Seward's Icebox	23
The Alamo.....	27
The Gold Rush and the 49ers	31
The Telegraph.....	35
The Cotton Gin.....	39
The Underground Railroad.....	43
The Monitor and the Merrimac	47
Reconstruction.....	53
The Union Pacific meets the Central Pacific	59
World War I.....	63
Prohibition	69
The Great Depression	75
Recovery from the Depression	79
World War II	85
The Bombing of Pearl Harbour	91

Iwo Jima	97
Nagasaki and Hiroshima.....	101
The Korean Conflict.....	107
The Panama Canal.....	115
The Bay of Pigs	119
The Moon Landing.....	127

INTRODUCTION

As any student of history knows, there have been significant events that have impacted humankind, and in some instances, changed the course of history. These events range from scientific discoveries to social movements. Some events have provoked wars, and yet others have led to peace and prosperity.

All too often these events are glossed over by historians, and given short shrift by others. This neglect is unfortunate, as these events have had in many cases a profound and lasting effect on the course of civilization. The signing of the Magna Carta, for example, had implications for men and women for centuries. In a similar fashion, the Declaration of Independence, severed our ties with Great Britain and led to the Revolutionary War.

Other events helped establish certain basic principles of freedom, while other events, such as the Gutenberg Press, led to mass literacy. Some events, such as the development of the Internet, did not occur overnight, but their implications and relevance are still being felt today.

For this reason, in history, and in the study of mankind, we often need to stop and consider various events and examine and explore the ramifications and repercussions of said events. Often we take a “What if?” questioning examination of certain events. “What if” Abraham Lincoln was not assassinated? What if the South had won the Civil War? What if John F. Kennedy had not taken that fateful trip to Dallas? What if Pearl Harbor had not been attacked?

While we can surmise and imagine these possibilities, the sad truth is that these events did occur and these events caused ripples of consternation, and as some would say created a “domino effect” leading to other later events. For example, if Pearl Harbor had not occurred, would there have later been a need to drop the atomic bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima?

For some historians, history is a long number of wars interrupted by very short period of peace. For other historians, history is a long period of growth and development, sadly interrupted by earthquakes, tornadoes, and other calamities. Yet for other historians, there are outside factors that

impact events- such as the writing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, which was thought to have contributed to the Civil War.

Positive events, negative events, scientific events, and various other events permeate American History, and literally, the history of the world. In this book, noted historian Donald Elder III is questioned about various events and provides his insights regarding these events. It is hoped that this venture into the events of American history will provide a rich, robust understanding of these events, and how they have contributed to what can only be termed- The American Experience.

The authors would like to thank Jimmy Kilpatrick of www.EducationViews.org for his support. These interviews were first posted on line at www.EducationViews.org and encouraged by him.

Donald Elder III

Michael F. Shaughnessy

AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR DONALD ELDER: THE GREATEST EVENTS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

PLYMOUTH ROCK

MICHAEL F. SHAUGHNESSY

- 1) Professor Elder, in this series of interviews, we are going to look at the events that really formed, and transformed this great country of ours. We will start today with the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock. Obviously, this event was years after Christopher Columbus discovered what he thought was America in 1492, but can you summarize what happened between Columbus's return to Spain, and what events led to the Pilgrims coming to Plymouth Rock?

When asked about Christopher Columbus, most Americans would tell you that the explorer was a pioneer who prompted others to emulate his voyages of discovery.

Actually, it turns out that there was another individual living in Spain at the same time as Columbus who also hoped to journey westward across the Atlantic Ocean. Known either as Giovanni Caboto or Zuan Chabotto, he was an Italian who came to believe, as Columbus did, that it was possible to sail west to reach Asia. When Columbus returned to Spain after his historic voyage to the Americas in 1492, his fellow Italian was inspired to go to England to suggest that he could accomplish the same result if that nation would finance a voyage.

Accordingly, in March of 1496 the English monarch King Henry VII gave him what were known as letters patent, granting him permission to sail west under the authority of the English crown. Unlike Columbus, Caboto chose to sail at a higher northern latitude, correctly assuming that this would result in a shorter voyage. Although historians disagree about where he actually made landfall, it is indisputable that Caboto (by now referred to by the English as John Cabot) reached the coast of North America in June of 1497.

Although the voyage of Cabot gave King Henry VII a claim to the North American coastline, the English monarch was not immediately interested in taking advantage of this opportunity. In fact, English kings and queens would never be responsible for colonial efforts in North America. Rather, it would be English citizens who would bear the financial responsibility for such ventures. The first of these came during the reign of Henry VIII's youngest daughter Elizabeth I. In 1578, she granted Sir Humphrey Gilbert permission to establish a colony in North America. Five years later, he founded a colony in present-day Newfoundland. Unimpressed with his prospects for success in that desolate location, Gilbert abandoned the effort in the fall of that year. Two years later, Sir Walter Raleigh organized a colonizing effort on island off the coast of North Carolina.

Given the name Roanoke, this venture was quickly abandoned. English colonists returned to that location in 1587, but when a relief expedition came in 1590 to provide for their needs, they found the Roanoke Colony deserted. After this debacle, no further colonies were founded during Elizabeth's reign. Her successor, James I, proved more amenable, giving his permission for a business consortium known as the Virginia Company of London to establish a colony. This led in 1607 to the establishment of Jamestown, the first successful English colony. It was to this company that a group of English religious dissidents applied for permission to live within the boundaries of the colony of Virginia. Called Separatists at the time, these individuals are known today as the Pilgrims. They would be the founders of the Plymouth Colony.

- 2) Now, who were some of the individuals on that ship and who was the leader of that ship or captain if you will?

There were actually two ships that were to carry the Pilgrims to the Virginia Colony: the Mayflower, and the Speedwell. Both vessels set sail for America on August 5, 1620. No sooner had the ships left the port of Southampton, England when the Speedwell developed a leak. The ships put into the port of Dartmouth for repairs, and resumed the voyage on August 23. Unfortunately, the Speedwell proved no more seaworthy after setting sail—obviously the name of the ship was not truly applicable in reality—and it was once again forced to seek repairs. After the two ships reached the port of Plymouth, it was decided that only the Mayflower would journey to America. Some passengers decided to remain in England, but others chose to transfer to the Mayflower. Because of this, when the Mayflower (commanded by Captain Christopher Jones) left Plymouth, it carried 30 crewmen and 102 passengers.

Most of the latter were Pilgrims, but some were not. Funding for the voyage had been provided by a group known as the Merchant Adventurers, and to insure their chances of being repaid by the Pilgrims they had insisted that certain individuals chosen by them should go with the settlers to America. Among these "Strangers," as the Pilgrims called them, were Christopher Martin and Myles Standish. Martin was given command of the emigrants while the voyage was underway, and Standish would be the military leader of the new colony. The Pilgrims were led by William Bradford, William Brewster, and John Carver. Carver was elected by the populace to replace Martin as the governor after the colony was established.

- 3) There may have been many reasons for the pilgrims coming to America, or to the other colonies at that time. Can you describe some of them?

While the first English colonists came to America to seek fortune, the Pilgrims were motivated on their journey by religious turmoil in England. Initially untouched by the Protestant Reformation, England had eventually turned away from the Catholic Church because of Henry VIII. Wishing to end his first marriage, he had sought an annulment from the pope. When the pontiff rebuffed his effort, Henry VIII decided to form his own church and make himself the head of his new creation. Although no longer under the authority of the pope, this new denomination (named the Church of England) kept many features of the Catholic Church.

In the ensuing years, however, a segment of the English populace began to believe that their new church needed to create even more distance between it and the Catholic Church. A number of issues proved especially vexing to these individuals. For one thing, they felt that local congregations should largely govern themselves, rather than answer to a centralized authority.

A second issue revolved around the cause of salvation. Many English dissidents believed that God had predestined individuals, a concept that had been initially suggested by the theologian John Calvin. But when they suggested that the Church of England embrace their point of view, they were rebuffed. Those opposed to the Church of England chose at the point to cease attending service, but Parliament countered with a law making it a crime to avoid going to church. While some dissidents chose to remain in the church in the hope of purifying it (becoming known in the process as Puritans) a small group believed that their only recourse was to leave the

church entirely. These separatists initially went to Holland to seek religious freedom in 1607.

After a decade in that new land, however, they felt that their identity was slowly eroding because of the pervasiveness of the surrounding Dutch culture. It was for this reason that they had made the decision to emigrate to America. By agreeing to repay the Merchant Adventurers for the cost of the trip, they hoped to find the freedom to worship as they chose and keep their English identity.

- 4) What happened immediately after landing, and do we have an exact date?

Most Americans believe that the Pilgrims came to the coast of Massachusetts and stepped off the Mayflower onto Plymouth Rock. The real story of their arrival in New England, however, is much more complex.

First, the Pilgrims made landfall far from their intended destination. The Virginia Company had allocated them land near the mouth of the Hudson River, but Plymouth is approximately 250 miles north of that location. While some of the Pilgrims felt that they needed to honor their agreement and sail south, the majority decided that they were better off living outside the jurisdiction of Virginia Company. They then had to select a place to land. They first sailed into a harbor where Provincetown, Massachusetts is currently situated. This is where they first went ashore on November 13, 1620. They then spent over a month scouting the coast of Massachusetts for a place to establish their colony.

After considering a number of locations, they finally decided on a place that at one time had been inhabited by Native Americans, and thus had large stretches of land that had already been cleared. Finally coming ashore on December 21, the Pilgrims named their new home in honor of the port city in England that had been their last point of departure. While they may have stepped on Plymouth Rock while getting out of the boat, there is no actual proof either that they did or did not.

- 5) Why is this event important, and what seemed to happen immediately after this event in the years that followed?

For such a small group of people, the Pilgrims exerted an influence on modern-day America far exceeding their numbers. First, they gave us one of the fundamental building blocks of our democracy, the Mayflower Compact. Because of the concerns voiced about the legality of their

location of choice, the Pilgrim leaders had decided that a set of rules to govern their existence was called for. These guidelines were agreed to by 41 members of the group. This covenant established the principle of self-government, one that we still embrace to this day.

Second, after a disastrous first winter that saw half of the colony die, the Pilgrims held a Thanksgiving in November of 1621 to celebrate their first harvest. The modern-day holiday that we celebrate is directly descended from this event. The Pilgrims would never be a numerous people, and the colony itself would cease to exist in 1691 when it was absorbed by Massachusetts, but these two Pilgrim accomplishments have guaranteed their continued level of esteem.

6) What have I neglected to ask?

This is a very appropriate subject to address first in this series, as it illustrates an important point about our nation's past. We think that we know about the events that shaped our country, but we actually remember a crafted version of the past. How that image has been shaped says as much about us as the actual event does.

AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR DONALD ELDER: EVENTS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

MICHAEL F. SHAUGHNESSY

- 1) Professor Elder, we have already examined some of the events that led up to the Declaration of Independence- such as the Boston Tea Party. What was the final proverbial straw that led to the actual Declaration of Independence?

Contrary to what many people believe, the colonists who took up arms in the spring of 1775 against the British were not unanimous in their opinion regarding what their course of action actually represented. Some clearly felt from the beginning that the only logical goal to strive for was a complete break with the mother country, but many others hoped that the British might eventually give in to colonial demands to have their rights respected. It was during this period that the Battle of Bunker Hill was fought and a colonial campaign to drive the British out of Canada occurred.

As these events transpired, delegates to the Second Continental Congress debated whether to pursue independence or engage in negotiations aimed at bringing about a reconciliation. Two things then happened that tipped the scales in favor of the former.

First, the Congress received a reply to a request it had made to King George III to bring the conflict to a peaceful resolution. In no uncertain terms, the king rejected this suggestion, choosing instead to brand as rebels the colonists who had taken up arms.

Second, an English immigrant named Thomas Paine wrote a treatise in January of 1776 in favor of the cause of independence. Titled *Common Sense*, this pamphlet soon began to win people over to the idea of making a complete break with Great Britain. Soon, colony after colony issued instructions to their representative in the Congress to support a statement

on behalf of independence. Such a resolution was introduced on June 7, 1776, by Richard Henry Lee of Virginia. This resolution was passed on July 2, 1776, and many including John Adams—thought that this date should be considered the date of American independence.

Rather than that date, however, it is July 4 that we Americans recognize as our birth date. This is because after Lee's initial resolution was introduced, the Congress appointed five delegates to write a document that would state why the colonies were justified in taking such a momentous step. The Virginian Thomas Jefferson did the majority of the work on this document, and after Lee's resolution passed on July 2, Jefferson submitted his work to the Congress for its consideration. This document was adopted by a resolution of Congress on July 4, 1776.

- 2) Now, when and where was it actually signed, and what was the climate like in that room at that time?

Considering the importance of the signing of the Declaration of Independence to our nation, it is surprising that there is no agreement about when the document was actually signed. Many assumed when they first read the Declaration of Independence in the summer of 1776 that all 56 signers of the document affixed their names to it on July 4, but in the years after the American Revolution this interpretation was increasingly challenged. As a result, there are a number of estimates regarding how many individuals signed the document on July 4. These variations range from a low of one to as high as 34. All agree, however, that at least 22 of the individuals who signed the Declaration of Independence clearly did not do so until much later than July 4.

- 3) Most Americans know that John Hancock was there, writing his name in a large and legible fashion- but who else was there, and who was taking minutes if you will at this event?

John Hancock, a prosperous merchant from Massachusetts, served as the president of the Second Continental Congress. He was given this position for a number of reasons. He had, for example, presided over numerous town meetings in Boston, and was acceptable to delegates on both sides of the question regarding independence. When the Declaration of Independence was approved on July 4, Hancock had the document sent to a publisher to be printed. When the printer produced copies to be made available to the public, he put two names at the bottom of the text. One was that of John Hancock, and the other was the secretary of the Second Continental

Congress, Charles Thompson (who had taken the minutes for the meetings of the Congress).

These were typeset names, however, rather than signatures. We therefore don't know whether Hancock actually signed the original copy of Declaration of Independence or not.

Subsequently, another copy of the document was prepared for the members of the Congress to sign, and that was version where Hancock's famous signature appears. A commonly held view regarding the size of his signature is that he wrote it so large so that King George III would not need to put on his glasses to read Hancock's name, but this story was first told years after the signing and is considered today to be of dubious validity. Still, it was a bold move on Hancock's part, as it clearly identified him as being in favor of the cause of independence. Had Britain suppressed the rebellion, Hancock undoubtedly would have been hanged as a result of this stance.

- 4) What was the initial reaction among the 13 colonies, and what was King George's reaction, and the reaction in England?

Four days after the Declaration of Independence was approved by the Congress, the document received its first public reading in Philadelphia.

Within weeks, it had been published in newspapers in all 13 states. While not everyone responded positively to independence from Great Britain (about 5% of the American population would leave the United States at the end of the Revolutionary War), it is obvious that many were very receptive to this development.

The most famous example of this enthusiasm came from New York City. After the Declaration of Independence arrived there, a large group gathered around a statue of King George III and pulled it down. They then used the metal to cast bullets for the American Army. For the British, the reaction was quite the opposite.

While some argued that the best course of action would be to give the colonies their independence, most felt that the colonies were betraying their heritage. Criticism by the British of the document itself usually focused on the seeming hypocrisy of many signees of the Declaration of Independence. Noting the phrase "all men are created equal," they wondered how any of the signers could then in good conscience own slaves. Eventually, a number of the signers did indeed free their slaves, but

others—notably Thomas Jefferson, who was the main author of the document—never did. This remains a problematic aspect of what is otherwise an extremely stirring American story.

- 5) Some events are laden, unfortunately with blood, but this event was a summary type of judgment against an oppressive governmental system and unjust tax system. How was this event received around the world?

If the volley fired by the Minutemen at the British on April 19, 1775 is known as “the shot heard ‘round the world,” the contents of the Declaration of Independence should be viewed as “the words heard ‘round the world.” The influence of the document is recognizable in France through its Declaration of the Rights of Man and Nation, for example, and many nations in Latin America quoted the document when they sought to break away from Spain. Ho Chi Minh used the Declaration of Independence as his inspiration when he announced his rebellion in 1945 against the French in Indochina, and as recently as 1965 Rhodesia modeled its declaration proclaiming its independence after the handiwork of the Second Continental Congress. It clearly was one of the most influential documents ever in World History.

AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR DONALD ELDER: EVENTS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

MICHAEL F. SHAUGHNESSY

- 1) For many years, there was tension between the 13 colonies and England. What were some of the main concerns?

Discord between the 13 colonies and England had indeed been brewing long before hostilities began between the two sides in April of 1775. In retrospect, it appears that the rift started because of an incident that had happened as part of a conflict known in American history as King George's War. Starting in 1689, England had fought a series of wars against France, and King George's War was the third of these conflicts. As it had during the first two wars, England asked its North American subjects to provide aid by attacking French possessions in Canada. Accordingly, seven northern colonies pooled money and manpower in 1745 to conduct a campaign against the key French strategic post of Louisburg.

In a brilliant feat of arms, the colonists succeeded in this endeavor, and still occupied the fort when the war ended in 1748. Much to their chagrin, the colonists learned that one of the terms of the peace treaty mandated the return of Louisburg to French control. This outraged the colonists, because the English government had not even consulted them before giving the fruits of their efforts back to their enemy. Making things worse, the colonists learned that Louisburg was being given back to the French so that the Indian city of Madras (captured by the French during the war) could be returned to England. It thus seemed to many colonists that England cared more about its colonial possessions in India than it did about its subjects in North America. Fifteen years later, colonial dissatisfaction with England grew even greater because of another war.

After three inconclusive conflicts, the English had finally achieved a decisive victory over the French as a result of a struggle known in

American history as The French and Indian War. England's triumph, however, had come at a high cost. Troubled by the massive debt it had accumulated, England sought to: (a) avoid accruing any additional expenses; and (b) pay off its financial obligations as quickly as possible.

To accomplish these goals, England adopted measure that would prove highly unpopular to the colonists. First, England tried to insure that it would not have to fight another war in North America by forbidding English subjects from moving into territories claimed by Native Americans. This angered many colonists, who felt that the war had been fought to settle the question of whether the French or the English would be able to expand into the frontier regions. And second, to lower its debt, England began for the first time to directly tax its subjects in North America. Since the colonists had no representation in Parliament, they believed that the imposition of these taxes was unjust. These two issues would within a decade create such unhappiness in the thirteen colonies that they would take up arms against their Mother Country.

- 2) Apparently these tensions came to a head in Boston Massachusetts, on March 5, 1770. What was going on?

After a number of attempts to tax the colonists had failed, in 1767 the English government began to levy a tax on five items: paper, glass, lead, paint, and tea. These taxes (called the Townshend Duties) proved extremely unpopular with the colonists, and provoked an almost immediate reaction. To show their displeasure, the colonists decided to boycott all English products. This economic pressure paid dividends, as English merchants soon saw their profits dramatically decrease due to diminished business with the colonists. Accordingly, they called upon Parliament to repeal the taxes. Parliament acquiesced, revoking four of the Townshend Duties in January of 1770.

Due to the difficulty involved in sailing westward across the Atlantic at that time of year, however, news of this development did not reach North America for months. In the interim, violence had taken place in Boston. In that community, anger at England had been festering for quite some time. Part of their ire stemmed from a general unhappiness with the Townshend Duties, but some of it came from the fact that English soldiers were prominently stationed in Boston. Because English soldiers were paid poorly, many of them sought to supplement their income by taking part-time jobs. Willing to labor for less money than Bostonians, they often took work away from the colonists.

A number of confrontations between soldiers and Bostonians then took place. It was against this backdrop of hostility that the incident known as the Boston Massacre happened on March 5, 1770. That night, a verbal confrontation between an English soldier and a young Bostonian resulted in the colonist being struck in the head. Soon, an angry crowd began to gather to confront the soldier. Alarmed by this, the soldier called for help, and he was soon joined by a handful of his comrades. One of these men was jostled by a colonist, and he responded by firing his musket. Shortly thereafter (accounts varied regarding the exact amount of time that transpired), more English soldiers began to fire into the crowd. When the shooting stopped, five colonists were dead or dying, and six were wounded.

- 3) Crispus Attucks was apparently killed and was the first to die in this event. What do we know about this martyr who was slain?

Crispus Attucks was one of the five colonists who were killed by English soldiers, and appears to have been a person of color. By all accounts he was the first to die. Beyond that, nothing is known for certain. It is assumed that he was born in 1723 to an African-American father and a Native American mother. Circumstantial evidence—largely an advertisement in a Boston newspaper asking for help in capturing a run-away slave he owned named Crispus—suggests that he was not a free person. Most historians believe that he was a sailor by avocation. While many believe that he was actively engaged in the incident that night, no proof of that exists. In spite of this uncertainty, however, Crispus Attucks became a martyred hero to those colonists opposed to English tyranny.

He was also embraced as a symbol by African-Americans. Boston honored him in 1888 with a monument that still stands on the Boston Commons.

- 4) What was the reaction in the 13 colonies to this heinous event?

The reaction by the colonists to this occurrence may seem surprising, as no acts of retaliation took place against the English. Indeed, the only action taken by the colonists was to charge the English soldiers involved in the Boston Massacre with murder. Interestingly, these trials resulted in acquittals for all but two of the English soldiers, largely due to the legal acumen of their defense lawyer—John Adams, the future American president. This seemingly tepid response can perhaps best be explained by two facts. First, the English quickly moved their soldiers to a fort on an island located in Boston Harbor, thereby eliminating the chance for

another armed confrontation. And second, many colonists were not yet convinced that an irreparable break needed to take place between themselves and England. Rather than viewing armed resistance as necessary at that time, most colonists saw it instead as an impediment to a satisfactory resolution of their grievances.

They were therefore unwilling to embrace the violence involved in the Boston Massacre, choosing instead to take a less confrontational path of resistance (especially after they soon learned that England had ended most of the Townshend Duties). But the memory of the massacre would linger, and the enduring anger over the incident undoubtedly influenced the colonists when they chose five years later to take up arms against the Crown.

5) What was the response from Great Britain?

For Great Britain, the Boston Massacre was also looked upon as a cautionary tale. On the one hand, the English government now had definite proof of colonial unhappiness with its economic policies, but the fair trials given the soldiers demonstrated mob rule was not in control in Massachusetts. King George III and his advisors therefore decided to take no official action at the time, assuming that tensions would die down in the wake of the decision to repeal the onerous Townshend Duties. They were correct in this assumption, as only minor incidents would take place until the English government made the fateful decision in 1773 to enforce the collection of a tax on tea.

6) Apparently, Paul Revere actually drew a painting or engraving of the scene. What do we know about that and where might it be located?

Paul Revere was one of the best-known residents of Boston at that time. A skilled craftsman, he was both an exceptional silversmith and engraver. He put this latter skill to use when he made an engraving of the Boston Massacre that is today the most enduring image that we have of the incident. Rather than a completely accurate picture of the Boston Massacre, however, Revere's composition is clearly a piece of propaganda. In the engraving, for example, the lone officer on the scene is clearly giving an order to fire.

Accounts of those at the incident, however, make no mention of such instructions being given. In addition, it is evident in the engraving that someone is shooting at the colonists from inside the Boston Customs House, but the trial exonerated those individuals inside that building.

Revere's mistakes may have been due to the fact that he based his engraving on a drawing that had been made by an artist named Henry Pelham, but most historians believe that the discrepancies actually resulted from the fact that Revere was adamantly opposed to the English attempts to impose unjust taxes on the English colonies in North America.

Indeed, as a member of an opposition group known as The Sons of Liberty, he undoubtedly saw this incident as an opportunity to make political capital out of the incident. Paul Revere's engraving can be viewed to this day, as it is displayed at the Commonwealth Museum in Boston.

7) What have I neglected about the event?

The Boston Massacre bears eerie similarities to the shootings that took place at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio in 1970. There, a crowd composed primarily of young adults had staged a campus-wide protest to denounce a recent decision by President Nixon to send U.S. forces into Cambodia. A contingent of soldiers from the Ohio National Guard was sent to the school to keep the peace, but their presence only added to the students' anger. Feeling threatened by the hostile crowd, the Guardsmen—apparently without orders—fired on the protesters, killing four of them. Taking place precisely 200 years after the Boston Massacre and with almost exactly the same death toll, these incidents remind us that armed confrontations between civilians and soldiers have unfortunately been a part of our historical record.

AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR DONALD ELDER: EVENTS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE

MICHAEL F. SHAUGHNESSY

- 1) Professor Elder, one of the greatest events, at least in my mind, in American History was the Louisiana Purchase, which occurred during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. Can you tell us about what was going on in America at that time?

When the United States had achieved its independence after the Revolutionary War, its western boundary—the Mississippi River—was so far removed from where most Americans lived that it seemed unlikely that there would be any consideration of national expansion that far west for generations to come.

In actuality, only a few years after becoming a nation, it became apparent to some that the new nation would have to acquire new territory or quite possibly begin to dissolve. This dire realization resulted from the patterns of trade that had been embraced by Americans living on the frontier. Most settlers moving westward did so to create farms, with the hopes of selling their surplus crops for profit.

Unfortunately for them, it proved prohibitively costly to transport their produce overland to sell in the nation's cities. Soon, however, an alternative strategy was discovered. Because large stretches of the new nation were situated in the watershed of the Mississippi River, frontier farmers could load their produce on rafts, and then float these vessels at no cost down to the mouth of that river. They could then ship the goods on sailing vessels to the nation's urban centers.

As fate would have it, just as soon as this promising approach appeared, it seemed to be quickly invalidated. This was because the point at which the goods would be taken off the rafts and put on board ocean-going vessels was the city of New Orleans in present-day Louisiana, and authorities

there refused permission for such transactions (known as the right of deposit) to take place.

These individuals were representatives of the Spanish crown, because it turned out that New Orleans was situated at a point on the Mississippi River a few miles south of where America's claim to that waterway ended. Originally founded by the French, since 1763 that community had belonged to Spain because of the peace treaty that had ended the Seven Years War. Americans were perplexed by the Spanish attitude towards trade through New Orleans, because during the Revolutionary War Spain had fought alongside us against the British.

But once the United States had achieved independence, Spain began to perceive the new nation as a potential threat to its vast holdings on the North American continent. Spain believed that as Americans migrated south and west toward Louisiana, they would eventually contemplate migrating into that territory.

At that point, the Americans could well demand that the United States annex Louisiana. This possibility could be eliminated, however, if Spain denied the right of deposit. Americans, the Spanish reasoned, would not move westward if they saw no chance to sell their crops through Louisiana. Accordingly, the Spanish informed the United States of its new policy after we had achieved our independence. In 1795, Spain chose to allow trade to resume, but in 1798 it once again refused the right of deposit.

Thomas Jefferson, elected president in that year, then had to develop a strategy for dealing with Spanish intransigence on this issue. It occurred to him that if the United States acquired New Orleans, the problem would be resolved. Although fiscally conservative, Jefferson decided that it would be in the best interests of the nation if he could buy that city. This idea to gain control of New Orleans would eventually lead to the Louisiana Purchase.

2) Who were the principal people involved and how did this come about?

As previously noted, the American president who was responsible for the Louisiana Purchase was Thomas Jefferson. To achieve his goal, Jefferson employed two diplomats. Jefferson first utilized Robert Livingston, whom he had appointed in 1801 as his Minister to France. Livingston was chosen because in 1800 Spain had ceded Louisiana to France.

Accordingly, Jefferson gave Livingston instructions to buy New Orleans. This brought Livingston into contact with emissaries of the French ruler, Napoleon Bonaparte. Initially, the French showed no interest in Livingston's offer. Napoleon, it turned out, had ambitions to regain control of present-day Haiti, and felt that he would need New Orleans as supply base for French military forces operating on that island. Consequently, Livingston's diplomatic efforts came to naught.

For that reason, Jefferson sent James Monroe (who had been the Minister to France during the presidency of George Washington) to Europe to help Livingston with negotiations. By the time Monroe reached France, however, it turned out that the attitude of the French regarding Louisiana had changed dramatically. This was in large part due to the fact that the French had suffered a disastrous military reverse in their efforts to regain Haiti, and in 1803 Napoleon chose to end the campaign.

Thus, Napoleon had no further need for New Orleans. Contemplating a resumption of his efforts to gain control of the continent of Europe, decided that he would take the Americans up on their offer to purchase that city. Monroe had barely arrived in Paris when he and Livingston were informed that the French were amenable to negotiating a sale. Jefferson, Napoleon, Livingston, and Monroe are therefore the four individuals most responsible for the Louisiana Purchase.

- 3) How much was actually spent and how much land (approximately) was procured?

Originally, Jefferson had authorized Livingston to Purchase just the city of New Orleans for \$10,000,000. Napoleon, however, wanted to rid himself of all his holdings in North America, and offered to sell the entire Louisiana Territory for \$15,000,000. This clearly exceeded both in scope and price what he had been authorized to secure. Any initial reluctance that Livingston and Monroe might have had about exceeding instructions quickly vanished, as the two realized that Napoleon could easily change his mind on the sale.

Rather than wait for authorization from Jefferson, they therefore decided to agree to a treaty that purchased all of the Louisiana. In all, the United States acquired 828,000 square miles of territory from the French.

4) What was the reaction of the general public and Washington at that time?

In retrospect, it is surprising that not all Americans immediately embraced the Louisiana Purchase; after all, it doubled the size of the nation, and guaranteed that Americans could trade through New Orleans. But some Americans did find fault with this action. For some, the price tag associated with the purchase was regarded as exorbitantly high. Others objected to the fact that the Constitution did not explicitly give the government the authority to purchase land from a foreign country. Ironically, Jefferson had come into office as what we would today term a "strict constructionist," but he swallowed his scruples because of the benefits that would result from the acquisition of Louisiana.

Finally, there were many Americans living along the East Coast who had no liking for the purchase. They felt that many new states would be created from the Louisiana Territory, and increasing the number of states would diminish the influence of the original members of the Union. But most Americans believed that the Louisiana Purchase would greatly benefit the nation, and so ratification of the treaty with France was swift and virtually unanimous.

5) How was the Louisiana Purchase linked to the concept of "manifest destiny"?

At first glance it wouldn't appear that the Louisiana Purchase and Manifest Destiny have anything in common: the former occurred in 1803, while the latter is associated with the period after the end of War of 1812.

But looking at it another way, it seems that a causal relationship could be established between the two. Manifest Destiny is the belief that the United States would (and should) extend its control from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and it would become a reality when the United States took land known as the Mexican Cession in the Mexican War. But this acquisition only made sense because the United States already controlled lands west of the Mississippi River, courtesy of the Louisiana Purchase.

From this perspective, without the land acquired by Jefferson already under our control few Americans would have felt that the United States extending from one coast to the other was as inevitable as the concept of Manifest Destiny made it out to be.

6) What have I neglected to ask about the impact of this great event?

The benefits of the Louisiana Purchase for the United States are almost incalculable. Great cities developed in the region we acquired from France, for example, and our nation's grain belt would also be situated there. Taking the long view of history, however, it becomes apparent that there was one disastrous consequence that would eventually occur because of the acquisition. It is well for us to remember that hundreds of thousands of Native Americans living in that region would see their way of life come to an end through American expansion. Historical events always have consequences—the Louisiana Purchase aptly demonstrates that principle in both a positive and a negative manner.

