

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

GREAT AMERICANS AND THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

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LESSON 04 SESSION 04

4.9 The winning of the West

In a brief space of time, 50 years, was accomplished the stupendous task, entitled by President Roosevelt "the winning of the West," an accomplishment made possible by the sturdy character of the men and women who, so fearlessly and laboriously, carried on once they set their faces toward the golden West.

Accustomed to frugality and hard labor, inured to hardships and privation, stern in self-discipline and faith, mighty in determination and self-reliance, they not only left to posterity an inheritance of fertile land, virgin forests, great water resources, and untold mineral wealth, but, greater than the sum of all material gain, they passed on to this and succeeding generations the principles and traditions of independence, liberty, and justice, an example of the worth of clean living, high purpose, and great faith that should be an inspiration to every loyal American.

In the original grant of charter to the several Colonies by Great Britain, the western limits were practically undefined. Several of the Colonies claimed territory extending westward as far as the Mississippi River and north of the Ohio to the Great Lakes.

4.9.1 Northwest Territory.

In the compromises made, composing the differences between the Colonies, it was agreed to define the western boundaries of such Colonies to more restricted areas, dedicating the disputed territory to the United States, to be known as the "Northwest Territory," which at the time was occupied by French and British trading posts.

This area included what are now the States of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin. All territory lying west of the Mississippi River and east of the Rocky Mountains, from the Gulf of Mexico to an undetermined northern limit, was then a possession of Spain known as the "Louisiana Territory," transferred by Spain to France and then sold in 1803 to the United States.

With the exception of a few venturesome spirits who found their way across the mountains south of the Ohio River and as far west as the Mississippi, this land of ours was an unknown wilderness to the settlers of the Colonies.

Alive with deer, buffalo, and small game, rich in timber, fertile of soil, watered by numberless rivers and lakes, America at the close of the War of the Revolution still awaited discovery.

4.9.2 Slow development.

The thrilling story of the winning of the West is a series of events accomplished not by military force but rather by the efforts of a host of hardy pioneers who, with indomitable fortitude and incredible labor, won in succession the swamps, rolling prairies, forests, plains, rugged mountains, and the fruitful Pacific slope.

No single individual dominated this vast domain. It was the rank and file who conquered in this battle of the wilderness. Its conquest was not quickly accomplished. As in all great movements, leadership was developed, with here and there a man who became identified with some particular period or section.

4.10 Daniel Boone.

A native of North Carolina, born and developed under conditions that gave him physical strength and endurance beyond the average, courage, daring, and self-reliance, he was peculiarly fitted for what he declared to be the mission of his life — "ordained of God to settle the wilderness." He was the highest type of wilderness explorer. Living to the age of 86, he will continue to live throughout the annals of our history as an outstanding type of the earliest American. He exemplified in his life the value of clean living, high principles, and hard labor.

4.10.1 Settlement of Kentucky.

Undaunted by the unknown dangers of great swamps and forests, matching wits and woodcraft with the roving bands of hostile Indians, he led the first group of settlers across the Blue Ridge Mountains into the rich country of Kentucky. Here, amidst untold hardships, privations, and danger, there was set up the beginning of what has grown to be a mighty State, rich in natural resources and richer still in the treasure of its manhood and womanhood, descendants of the sturdy stock of Daniel Boone and those who followed him. These hardy pioneers bred into the succeeding generations that strength of purpose, endurance, initiative, and determination which has contributed so much to the richness and virility of American character.

4.11 George Rogers Clark

Capt. George Rogers Clark saved the settlers in Kentucky from massacre by the Indians and was the hero of the conquest of the Northwest Territory, now represented by Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

4.11.1 Military expeditions.

He led his small force of less than 200 men against the French outposts of southern Illinois. With their capture he turned his attention to the British garrison at Fort Sackville on the Wabash River at Vincennes, Ind.

In the capture of this fort Captain Clark and his sturdy band accomplished one of the most difficult marches in military history. Crossing the "drowned lands" of southern Illinois in the month of February 1779, they carried on through water oftentimes above their waists, without provisions or supplies other than that carried upon their backs. Through a wilderness untraveled and unknown by white men, this small band of backwoodsmen took the British by surprise, demanded and received the unconditional surrender of the garrison. By this remarkable exploit America was forever rid of foreign domination, and title to this region was given to the United States.

4.11.2 His monument.

Capt. George Rogers Clark was among the greatest of the forefathers of the mid-West. By the inspiration of his spirit, fortitude, and courage, this handful of men acquired possession of this inland empire of America. By acts of heroism, serving without pay, and assuming the debts contracted in this campaign, Captain Clark magnified his devotion to his country. The memorial to his self-sacrificing service is not to be found in tablets or statues of bronze, but rather in the great Commonwealths that now comprise this territory — the heart of America.