

Frontier experience uniquely American

- A. **Alexis de Toqueville's *Democracy in America*** (1835) -- Individualism and equality formed the distinguishing values of antebellum American life. Toqueville defined the terms for discussion of the American character in the early half of the 19th century.
 - Compared to eastern counterparts, western life was extremely rough, and westerners were generally more "crude" in their habits and lifestyle; highly individualistic
- B. Democracy on the frontier
 1. Equality reigned on the frontier; (except slavery)
 2. White manhood suffrage came to be the rule.
 3. Lovers of freedom : Cherished states' rights and localism
 4. Intensely patriotic and nationalistic
- C. Next Stop → **Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Hypothesis**

Artistic Achievements

- A. Thomas Jefferson probably finest American architect of his generation
 - Brought classical design to Monticello while the quadrangle of the Univ. of VA at Charlottesville is one of the finest examples of classical architecture in America.
- B. Artists
 1. **Gilbert Stuart** (1755-1828) among the best American painters of the era.
 - Several portraits of Washington, all somewhat idealized and dehumanized.
 2. **Charles Willson Peale** (1741-1827) painted some 60 portraits of Washington.
- C. **Hudson River School** of Art
 - Emphasized romantic mirrorings of local landscapes
- D. Louis Daguerre, a Frenchman, invented a crude photograph known as the daguerreotype.
- E. Music: **Stephen Foster** wrote famous black songs ("darky" tunes)

Literature

- A. Few Americans read "polite" literature in early 19th c.
 1. Poured most of their creative efforts into practical outlets.
 2. Much of their reading matter was imported or plagiarized from England.
 3. American literature received a strong boost from nationalist wave after War of 1812.
- B. The **Knickerbocker Group** in NY boasted some of America's greatest early writers.
 1. **Washington Irving** (1783-1859)
 - a. First American to win international recognition as a literary figure.
 - b. 1809, *Knickerbocker's History of N.Y.*: amusing caricatures of the Dutch c. 1819-20, - *The Sketch Book* -- English and American themes and included Dutch-Amer. tales "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"
 - c. Also a historian: Washington's biography and other historical works.
 2. **James Fenimore Cooper** (1789-1851)
 - a. First American novelist to gain world fame.
 - b. *The Spy* (1821), *Leatherstocking Tales*; *Last of the Mohicans*
 3. **William Cullen Bryant** (1794-1878)
 - a. "Thanatopsis" (1817) -- One of first high-quality poems by an American.

C. Transcendentalism

1. Emerged in New England during 2nd quarter of the 19th c.
 - a. Resulted in part from a liberalizing of the austere Puritan theology.
 - b. Also owed much to foreign thinkers including German romantic philosophers.
2. Philosophy
 - a. Truth "transcends" the senses: cannot not be found by empiricism alone.
 - b. Every person possesses an inner light that can illuminate the highest truth and put him/her in direct touch with God, or the "Oversoul."
 - c. Individualism in matters of religion as well as social.
 - i. Commitment to self-reliance, self-culture, and self-discipline.
 - ii. Hostile to formal institutions of any kind and conventional wisdom.
3. **Ralph Waldo Emerson** (1803-1882)
 - a. "Oversoul" philosophy of an organic universe.
 - b. Stressed self-reliance, self-confidence, self-improvement, optimism, and freedom.
4. **Henry David Thoreau** (1817-1862)
 - a. Associate of Emerson; a poet, mystic, transcendentalist, and nonconformist.
 - b. *Walden: Or Life in the Woods* (1854)
 - c. Essay on *Civil Disobedience* -- Written as a result of his brief experience in jail when he refused to pay taxes to support the Mexican war effort.
 - Writings later encouraged Mahatma Gandhi to resist British rule in India and later Martin Luther King's thinking about nonviolence.
5. **Walt Whitman** (1819-1892) - *Leaves of Grass* (1855)
6. **Margaret Fuller** -- published "The Dial"

D. Poetry: **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow** (1807-1882)

1. One of most popular poets ever produced in America - Wrote historically-based poetry
2. Most admired poems based on American traditions: "Evangeline," "Hiawatha," and "The Courtship of Miles Standish," and "Paul Revere's Ride."

E. Individualists and Dissenters

1. **Edgar Allan Poe** (1809-1849)
 - a. Gifted lyric poet *The Raven*, *Tamerlane* and many tales of terror & darkness
 - b. Excelled in the short story: Explored the world of the spirit and the emotions
2. **Nathaniel Hawthorne**
 - a. *The Scarlet Letter* (1850); *The Marble Faun* (1860)
 - b. Reflected Calvinist obsession with original sin and with never-ending struggle between good and evil.
3. **Herman Melville** (1819-1891): *Moby Dick*; *Typee*; *Billy Budd*
 - a. Lashed out at the popular optimism of his day.
 - b. Believed in the Puritan doctrine of original sin and his characters spoke the mystery of life.

F. Journalism

1. Newspaper bolstered by increased literacy
2. Tabloid of "gutter journalism" focused on murders, scandals, & other human interest stories.
3. Decades just before the Civil War marked the golden age of personal journalism
 - a. **Horace Greeley** -- editor and owner of *New York Tribune*
 - i. Incredibly influential in forming public opinion. (even outside NY state)
 - ii. Merciless foe of slavery
4. Increased public knowledge meant an increased ability to make democracy work.