

Did You Know?

- The United States successfully sent astronauts to the moon in 1969 and landed an unmanned spaceship on Mars in 1975.
- The telephone, airplane, credit card, and computer were invented in the United States.
- The United States has the third-largest population in the world.
- Nearly 80 percent of all residents of the United States live in cities.
- The “largest” city in the United States is Juneau, Alaska. It covers about 3,000 square miles (7,770 sq km). That’s larger than the state of Delaware.
- The United States has more than 250,000 rivers.
- More than 50 volcanoes in the United States have erupted within the last two hundred years.
- Although the Missouri River is longer, the Mississippi River is the largest river in the United States. It empties more than half a million cubic feet of water into the Gulf of Mexico every second.
- In 1940, Maurice and Richard McDonald opened a car-hop type restaurant in San Bernardino, California, that would go on to become one of the world’s largest fast-food chain restaurants.
- The United States has around 4 million miles (6 million km) of highways and many more miles of roads.
- Founding fathers Thomas Jefferson and John Adams both died on 4 July 1826, 50 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Flag

The U.S. flag was adopted in 1777. The 13 stripes represent the 13 original colonies. The 50 stars stand for the 50 states. Blue stands for loyalty, devotion, truth, justice, and friendship. Red symbolizes courage. White represents purity. The flag is known as Old Glory.



National Image

The bald eagle, a native of North America, became the national bird in 1782. It is a symbol of strength and freedom.



People and Places

Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 3,794,100
Area (sq. km.): 9,826,675

Stretching across the central portion of North America, the United States includes Alaska, in the far northwest, and the Hawaiian Islands, in the Pacific Ocean. Slightly larger than China, the United States has almost every kind of geography: tundra, deserts, mountains, forests, wetlands, and prairies. The West is a mix of valleys and mountains, as well as the beaches and coastline of California. The high Rocky Mountains drop into the Midwest, a region of fertile plains and prairies. The East has rolling hills and forests. The Southeast has forests and wetlands. Hawaii’s rugged volcanic landscape is lush and green year-round. Alaska has a diverse landscape, with



towering mountains, broad valleys, and glaciers.

The climate is mostly mild, but hurricanes, tornadoes, and harsh winters and summers are not uncommon. East of the Mississippi River, the climate is generally more humid, while western areas are drier.

Population

Population: 318,892,103

The United States has the third-largest population in the world, behind China and India. Most Americans are white and descend from European immigrants. *Hispanics* (people from Spanish-speaking countries) make up more than 15 percent of the population and are the largest and fastest-growing minority group. Around 13 percent of the population is of African descent. Asians, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, and peoples of the Middle East make up the rest.

Immigrants have a special role in American history: nearly everyone is an immigrant or descends from one. There are 562 Native American tribes and tribal groups in the United States, representing *indigenous* (native) peoples who lived in North America before Europeans arrived.

Language

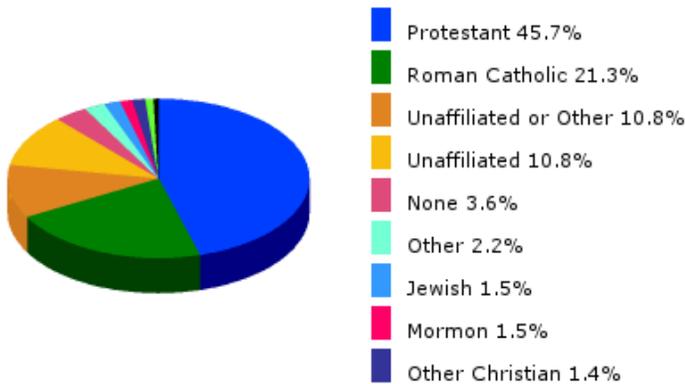
English has been the main language since the United States became a country. It is slightly different from the English spoken in England. However, hundreds of other languages are spoken in homes around the country. In fact, one in seven Americans speaks a language other than English in the home. The most common of these is Spanish. More than 36 million people speak Spanish, and many students study it at school. Many large cities have neighborhoods that share a language, such as Portuguese, Chinese, or Polish. There are also numerous native languages spoken here, including Navajo, Blackfeet, Crow, and Yup'ik, that are spoken nowhere else on earth.



Can You Say It in American Regional English?

Hello	<i>Howdy</i>	(HOW-dee)
Hoagie	<i>Grinders</i>	(GRINE-ders)
Small valleys	<i>Hollows</i>	(HAW-lers)
Clam	<i>Quahog</i>	(co-hog)
Swampy creek	<i>Bayou</i>	(BUY-oo)
Guy	<i>Hombre</i>	(OME-bray)
Northerner	<i>Yank</i>	(YANK)
Newcomer	<i>Greenhorn</i>	(GREEN-horn)

Religion



Source: *The World Factbook 2014. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2014.*

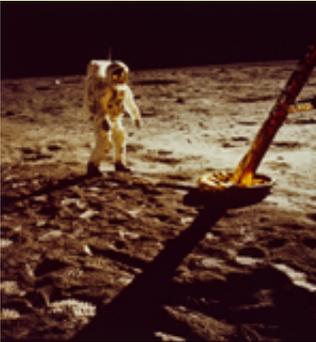
About 85 percent of Americans claim religious beliefs of some type. Most of them are Christians. Early European settlers were mainly Christians, and the Constitution and Bill of Rights are based, in part, on Christian values and principles. However, the Constitution states that church and state should remain separate. Many different Christian churches are found throughout the country. More than half of Americans belong to Protestant churches. Baptists, Methodists, and Lutherans are the largest Protestant groups. About 24 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. There are also large numbers of Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and other religions. Between 40 and 45 percent of Americans attend church services weekly. Religion is generally a personal matter for Americans, but some openly discuss their beliefs with others.

History

Time Line

	For 30,000–40,000 years, many groups of native people inhabit North America in cities, settlements, and family groups; they range from what is now Central America to Alaska
AD 1500	
AD 1565	The first permanent European settlement in North America—St. Augustine—is founded by the Spanish in what is now Florida
1570s	The Iroquois Confederacy (a group of native tribes) is founded in response to European colonization
1607	The Jamestown Colony is settled
1620	Pilgrims begin the Plymouth Colony
	
1700	

1700s	Hundreds of thousands of Africans are brought over and sold into slavery to work on cotton and tobacco plantations
1763	Britain gains control of territory up to the Mississippi River following its victory over France in the Seven Years' War
1774	Colonists form the First Continental Congress as Britain closes down Boston Harbor and deploys troops in Massachusetts
1775	The Revolutionary War begins; George Washington leads the Continental Army to fight against British rule
1776	Leaders sign the Declaration of Independence
1787	The Constitution is accepted and approved
	
1789	George Washington is elected the first president
1791	The Bill of Rights guarantees individual freedom
1800	
1803	The Louisiana Territory is bought from France, doubling the size of the United States
1812–1815	The War of 1812 is fought between the United States and Britain
1830s	Native Americans are forced to take the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma
1840s	Pioneers travel west on the Oregon and Mormon Trails
1848	Gold is discovered in California; war forces Mexico to give up California and the southwest
1860	Abraham Lincoln is elected president
1861–65	The Civil War is fought over slavery after 11 southern states <i>secede</i> (withdraw) from the United States
1863	President Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring slaves in Confederate states to be free
1865	The Confederates are defeated; slavery is <i>abolished</i> (outlawed) under the Thirteenth Amendment; President Lincoln is assassinated
1876	Sioux Indians defeat U.S. troops at Little Big Horn
1890	U.S. troops defeat Sioux Indians at Wounded Knee
1898	The United States gains Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, and Cuba following the Spanish-American war; the United States <i>annexes</i> (incorporates) Hawaii
1900	
1917–18	The United States fights in World War I

1920	Women win the right to vote; alcohol is outlawed under Prohibition	
1924	Native Americans are granted U.S. citizenship	
1929–41	The Great Depression causes many to lose homes and jobs; 13 million people are unemployed	
1941	The Japanese attack Pearl Harbor; the United States enters World War II	
1945	The United States drops two atomic bombs on Japan; World War II ends	
1947	The Cold War with the Soviet Union begins	
1950	Senator Joseph McCarthy launches a four-year crusade to expose American Communists in government and the arts; the United States enters the Korean War to help protect South Korea from the Communist North	
1953	U.S. forces withdraw from Korea	
1963	President John F. Kennedy is assassinated	
1964	The Civil Rights Act makes it illegal to have different laws for whites and blacks	
1965	U.S. troops are sent to Vietnam to help the southern Vietnamese fight against the Communist North Vietnamese army	
1968	Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy are killed	
1969	U.S. astronaut Neil Armstrong becomes the first man to walk on the moon	

1973	The United States leaves Vietnam after losing the Vietnam War and 58,000 American lives	
1986	The space shuttle Challenger explodes shortly after takeoff from Cape Canaveral; all seven crew members are killed	
1995	Gulf War veteran Timothy McVeigh bombs a government building in Oklahoma, killing 168 people	
2000		
2001	Terrorists attack New York City and Washington, D.C.; more than three thousand people are killed	
2003	The United States leads an invasion of Iraq to overthrow dictator Saddam Hussein	
2005	Hurricane Katrina hits the gulf coast states, devastating the city of New Orleans and killing hundreds of people	
2006	More than a million immigrants participate in a nationwide protest against proposed immigration reform	
2008	Barack Obama is elected as the first African American president in U.S. history; trouble in the U.S. housing and financial markets contributes to a global financial crisis	

2010	The <i>Deepwater Horizon</i> oil drilling rig explodes, spilling hundreds of millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico and becoming the largest offshore oil spill in United States history	
2011	U.S. forces kill al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in an operation in Pakistan; the final space shuttle mission is completed with the landing of <i>Atlantis</i> on 21 July, bringing about the end of the 30-year program	
2013	3 people are killed and at least 170 injured when two bombs explode near the finish line of the Boston Marathon; the federal government shuts down for the first time in 17 years after Congress fails to pass a budget in the middle of a deadlock over a healthcare reform law passed in 2010	
2014	The killing of a young, unarmed black man by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, sparks a wave of protests, which occasionally turn into rioting and looting; police respond with rubber bullets and tear gas, and the National Guard is called in to restore order; President Obama announces the United States will seek to restore its relationship with Cuba and open a U.S. embassy in Havana	
PRESENT		

Native America

Before the first Europeans arrived, North America was home to millions of native people. Each group had its own language, lifestyle, and traditions. The people shaped their lives around the land and resources where they lived. Some farmed, some hunted bison, some built cities and settlements. European settlers first relied on the native people to help them survive. As European settlements grew and demand for more resources increased, native people were starved and pushed off their lands, and many were killed in open battle. Today there are 562 recognized native tribal groups that celebrate their heritage, work to preserve their language, and express their unique tribal arts.



Settlement and Revolution

Colonists from Great Britain and other countries began to settle America's east coast in search of land, riches, and religious freedom. At first, many died of disease, hunger, or war with natives. As more British colonists arrived, they established 13 colonies along the East Coast. Britain taxed the colonists heavily. Unhappy, the colonists declared independence in 1776 and defeated Britain in the Revolutionary War. Leaders created a *democratic* (run by the people) government, which balanced the rights of the states and the federal government and protected free speech. In 1789, George Washington was elected the first president. Before long, explorers and pioneers headed west and settled large areas of land. The United States began to gain control of territory from other nations such as France, Mexico, Russia, and Spain, eventually expanding its borders from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.



Slavery and Civil War

Slavery became a divisive issue as the United States grew. Between 1650 and 1865, 10.2 million African people were captured, shipped across the Atlantic, and sold to North American slave owners. Slavery was legal throughout America, but the Southern states especially relied on slave labor to run farms and plantations. In 1787, Congress outlawed slavery in all territories northwest of Ohio. The invention of the cotton gin in 1789 brought explosive growth to the cotton industry in the Southern states, and slavery grew much more important in the South. Conflict increased between the Northern and Southern states over slavery and over whether individual states had the right to decide about slavery or if states had to obey the laws of Congress. These conflicts started the American Civil War, which lasted from 1861 to 1865 and killed at least 618,000 soldiers.



World Wars and Depression

In 1917, the United States entered World War I against Germany, and many Americans died. Good times followed until the 1930s, when the Great Depression caused millions to lose their jobs and homes. Only when the United States entered World War II in 1941 did the economy improve. However, the war cost the country more than half a million lives.



Social Change

The United States has changed a lot since 1950. African American and other minority groups have worked to be treated fairly. Women have important roles in the workplace now. Families have fewer children, and couples divorce more often. Computers continue to change people's lives. Americans are living longer, but poor eating habits, drugs, and stress have created new problems. Terrorism is another serious threat.



Lifestyle

Games and Sports

Americans are crazy about sports. Baseball, football, basketball, and hockey get the most attention, but hundreds of sports are popular. Soccer is growing especially popular with kids. Children like card and board games, but computer or video games are even more common. Games like tag, jump rope, hopscotch, and hide-and-seek remain favorites.



Holidays

Christmas easily wins as most kids' favorite holiday. Getting together with family, eating big meals, and waiting for Santa Claus to leave presents under a decorated tree are part of the tradition, though every family celebrates differently. Many Jews celebrate Hanukkah, a holiday in the same season. Independence Day (4 July) commemorates the nation's freedom, and people celebrate by having parades, picnics, and fireworks.

Halloween is a very popular holiday with children. Celebrated on the last day of October, children dress up in costumes and go door-to-door "trick-or-treating." People answer the door and hand out candy to the children. Popular costumes include traditional scary ones such as witches, ghosts, or monsters as well as favorite characters from movies and books. Many families carve jack-o'-lanterns. They set them on their porches and place a lit candle inside to make the faces glow.



Food

Because of its immigrants, the United States has many kinds of foods. For example, Chinese, Italian, and Mexican foods are common favorites. Tacos, spaghetti, sushi, and curry are just a few of the popular ethnic foods that have become a part of the mainstream American diet. Busy schedules mean many families eat out at fast-food restaurants or serve quick, microwavable meals. But many families cook regular meals, too.

There are many traditional dishes associated with specific regions of the country. Shrimp Creole is a famous meal from the South made with shrimp, tomatoes, onions, and peppers served with hot sauce over rice. Clam chowder is a favorite dish from the Northeast and can be made in both white and red varieties. The Southwest is known for its Tex-Mex cuisine, which mixes Mexican and American flavors. Fajitas are a commonly eaten dish, made from seasoned meat or chicken served in tortillas with grilled peppers and onions and topped with sour cream.

Although some Americans are vegetarians, most eat meat. Hot dogs, hamburgers, and fried chicken sell by the billions. Soft drinks are very popular. People in the United States eat beef, pork, chicken, and turkey in fairly large quantities. Fresh vegetables and fruits are available year-round. Most Americans are open to trying new foods, and the culture easily adapts to new tastes.



Schools

Adult Literacy: 99%

Most kids start kindergarten at age five and then go to elementary school for six years. They go to junior high school for two or three years and high school for three or four years. Most students go to public schools, but some choose to attend private schools or are taught at home. English, math, science, and history are common subjects. Some schools require foreign language study, but it is up to the individual states and school boards to decide. Some students attend college, while others start working right out of high school.

Life as a Kid

American kids get up in the morning and go to school for about seven hours a day. They study various subjects including math, science, reading, and American history. When they get home, they do homework, surf the internet, instant message or text their friends, play video games, or practice a musical instrument. The average child also watches television three to five hours per day. Kids like to snack on chips and other goodies while they watch. Many kids stay active playing sports such as soccer or baseball and riding their bikes, scooters, or skateboards. American kids often eat dinner with their families around 6 p.m. They usually live with their immediate family (parents and siblings) but enjoy visiting their extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins) on holidays.



Society

Government

Capital: Washington, D.C.

Head of State: Pres. Barack Obama

Head of Government: Pres. Barack Obama



The United States has a *constitution*, which gives rules for running the government. The government has three parts, or branches. The *legislative* branch makes the laws. This includes a Senate of 100 people (two per state) and a House of Representatives with 435 people (different numbers per state, depending on the population). Congress is dominated by the Republican and Democratic parties. Smaller parties are active throughout the country. The *executive* branch, led by the president, enforces the laws. The president is elected by an electoral college, which represents the vote of the people in each state. Presidential elections are held every four years. The *judicial* branch (courts) decides if the laws follow the Constitution. Supreme Court justices are appointed by the president and then approved by the Senate. The voting age is 18.

Money and Economy

Currency: U.S. dollar

The United States, which has the largest economy in the world, produces many things. The United States is a leader in industry and technology. Its industries create food, clothing, cars, toys, and computers. Agriculture and mining develop natural resources, as do the forestry and commercial fisheries industries. Key agricultural products include wheat, corn, cotton, fruits and vegetables, beef, pork, poultry, and dairy products. Service industries such as health care, education, tourism, and banking also provide many jobs. Although Americans live comfortably compared to many others around the globe, there is a growing gap between the rich and the poor. American money is important around the world.



Getting Around

Americans love their cars. The United States is so big, and people often live so far away from where they work and shop, that most Americans feel they need a car. Buses, trains, subways, and light rails mostly run in big cities. Many people take a plane when going out of state. Bikes, scooters, and motorcycles are used far less than they are in other countries. In the West, where there is not enough water to support larger concentrations of people, towns and settlements are farther apart. Public transportation in most western places is too expensive and impractical, so people rely on cars.



Culture Facts & Contacts

All That Jazz

Did you know jazz music is an American invention? And the blues? How about rock and roll, bluegrass, and country music? They are, too. Because America blends so many cultures and influences, it has produced wonderful forms of music. Jazz, blues, and rock and roll owe a great debt to African slave music and musicians. Bluegrass and country have been influenced by the musical traditions of Scotland, Ireland, and England.



Learn More

Contact the U.S. Department of State, 2201 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20520; phone (202) 647-6575; web site www.state.gov. Or write to the White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20500; web site www.whitehouse.gov.

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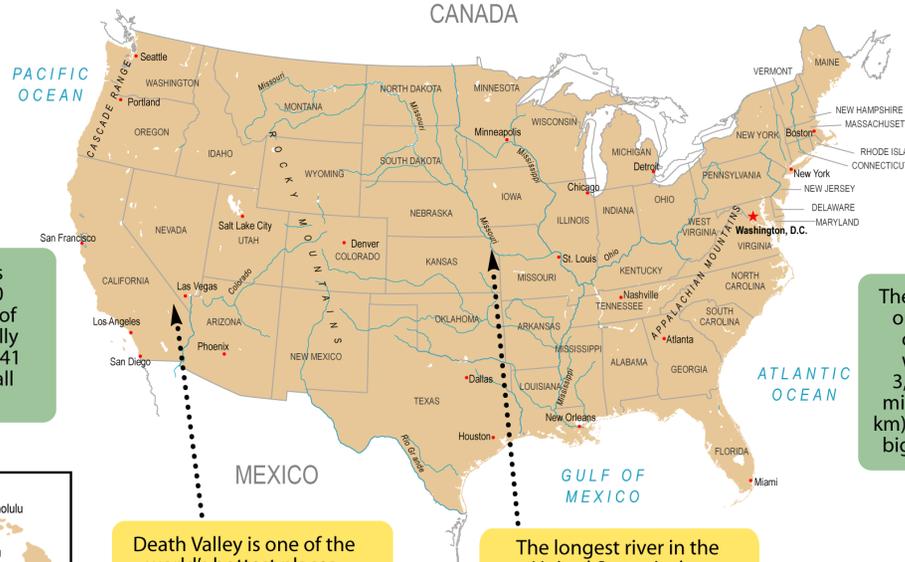
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United States of America



The highest point in the United States is Mount McKinley, which stands 20,320 feet (6,194 m) tall.



The United States has about 12,380 miles (19,924 km) of coastline. It's actually 88,633 miles (142,641 km) if you count all the curves.



Death Valley is one of the world's hottest places. Temperatures there reach 134°F (57°C).

The longest river in the United States is the Missouri River. It stretches for 2,500 miles (4,023 km).

The United States is one of the largest countries in the world. It covers 3,618,765 square miles (9,372,558 sq km), an area 17 times bigger than France.