

US HISTORY

EARLIEST SETTLERS & COLONISATION PERIOD

12,000 B.C. – the first settlers came to the American continent from Asia via the **Bering land bridge**. It is now the Bering Strait, which is the narrowest point of which the two continents are about 53 miles.

12th October 1492 – although **Christopher Columbus** planned on finding a new way to India, he landed in what is today the Dominican Republic. He was an Italian working for the Spanish Queen Isabella and died believing that he had landed in India, hence the term for the native Americans, Indians.

Other important explorers of the American continent of that time were: **John Cabot** (English), **Amerigo Vespucci** (Spanish), **Giovanni Verazzano** (Italian, but worked for France) and **Ponce de Léon** (Spanish) who founded the 1st permanent European settlement on the mainland of North America → **St Augustine** (Florida, 1565).

After the first European settlers had come to the continent, tobacco, potatoes and other goods started being exported to Europe.

1587 – the first British attempt at settlement in (what is now) the US took place.

A small colony was founded on the **Roanoke Island** off the eastern coast of North America and **Sir Walter Raleigh** was its leader. The settlement would have been the first permanent English colony in the New World, had the settlers not disappeared owing to unknown circumstances.

1607 – the first successful British settlement was established in **Jamestown** (Virginia → named after the **Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I.**). At first, it was difficult for the colonists to survive as they were unprepared. However, they were helped by the Indians. **Captain John Smith** played an important role in the establishment of the colony and wrote about **Pocahontas**, whose real name was Amonute or Matoaka, who rescued him when he was captured by the **Powhatan tribe**.

1619 – the first slaves from Africa were imported to the continent.

1620 – Plymouth Colony was founded by the **Pilgrim Fathers**, who arrived on the **Mayflower** from England and who were Puritans. They wished to reform the Church of England by eliminating certain Roman Catholic traditions. They were educated (founded the 1st university on the continent – **Harvard**), led a very simple life (no music, no alcohol, no nice clothing), followed the Bible word by word and believed that the more you suffer during your life, the better life you get after death. **Mayflower compact** was the first American attempt at self-government. It was a written document including laws.

1621 – the Plymouth colonists and **Wampanoag** Native Americans shared an autumn harvest feast, which is celebrated annually in the US as **Thanksgiving Day**.

1629 – the Massachusetts Bay Colony was established. It was a colony consisting of a group of about 1,000 Puritan refugees from England.

1681 – the colony of **Pennsylvania** was established by **William Penn**, who belonged to the Religious Society of Friends (**Quakers**). They were pacifists and promoted religious freedom.

1660 – 1732 - the process of colonising the East was completed and the original **13 colonies** were established: *Virginia, Massachusetts Bay, New York, Maryland, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, North Carolina, South Carolina, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Delaware and Connecticut*. Each colony had some kind of government (some representative body).



EVENTS LEADING TO THE WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE

1754–1763 – The French and Indian War is the name for the North American theatre of the **Seven Years' War**. It was fought mainly between the colonies of Great Britain and New France, with both sides supported by forces from Europe as well as American Indian allies. Americans expected some reward for their help, but the British imposed more taxes on them: *the Sugar Act* (sugar tax), *the Stamp Act* (all official documents had to have a stamp on them) or *the Quartering tax* (colonies had to provide accommodation for British soldiers). However, American colonists did not want to pay tax to Great Britain as they had no representatives in the distant British Parliament → “*No taxation without representation*”.

1770 – Boston Massacre – a group of drunken colonists going home from a pub attacked British soldiers with snowballs, the soldiers started to shoot and 5 colonists died.

1773 – Boston Tea Party was a protest to all the taxes (especially *the Tea tax*). Some colonists refused to pay the tax, so they dressed in the Mohawk warrior disguises and threw the tea from cargo ships into the water. Consequently, the British closed the harbour of Boston until the Americans paid for all the tea. Another consequence of the protest was that the British ended the Massachusetts Constitution and ended free elections of town officials. They also moved judicial authority to Britain and British judges.

THE WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE & THE EXPANSION OF THE USA

1775 – the War for Independence, known as the **American Revolution**, started. **The Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia** acted as the government. **The US army** was established (consisting of 17,000 men) with **George Washington** as its leader.

1776 – all political ties with Britain were cut and on 4 July 1776 the **Declaration of Independence**, written mainly by Thomas Jefferson, was signed.

1776 – the British captured New York.

1777 – **The Battle of Saratoga** was a decisive battle and success for Americans.

1778 – the French started to support Americans.

1781 – **The Battle of Yorktown** marked the victory for Americans.

1783 – **Treaty of Paris** officially recognised the **13 colonies as the United States of America**. A new government had to be established.

1787 – **the US Constitution** was written but did not come into effect until 1789.

1788 – **George Washington** became the first American President and New York the capital.

1791 – **10 amendments** were added to the Constitution, known as **the Bill of Rights**.

The USA began to expand significantly at the beginning of the 19th century.

1803 – **Louisiana** was purchased from **Napoleon** as he needed more money for wars. In the middle-west of the US, 13 new states were created.

1823 – **Monroe's Doctrine**, named after the fifth president of the US **James Monroe**, meant that no other country could come to America and proclaim it its territory.

1846 – 1848 – **the Mexican War**. Until the 1830s, Texas was part of Mexico, then it became independent and later was annexed by the USA. The war ended with a peace treaty and **California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, Colorado** became new American states.

1867 – **Alaska** was bought from the **Russian Empire**.

1959 – **Hawaii** became the 50th state of the USA.

THE CIVIL WAR

The Civil War was a series of fights between the North, which was industrial and where slavery was abolished, and the South, which was more oriented on agriculture and where slavery was still legal. The decision of whether the new US states would support slavery or not has not been made.

1821 – The Missouri Compromise meant that to the north and west of Missouri, there would be slave-free states and to the south of Missouri, slavery would be legal.

1854 – the compromise was cancelled. The new states were allowed to choose whether they wanted slavery or not. This led to even more tension between the South and the North. The South wanted to leave the Union if **Abraham Lincoln** became president.

1860 – Abraham Lincoln, who was an abolitionist (wanted to abolish slavery), became the 16th US president.

1861 – 11 southern states left the Union (23 remained loyal) and a new country was created, called the **Confederate States of America**, commonly referred to as the Confederate States or the Confederacy, with **Jefferson Davis** as its president and a new capital established in **Richmond** (Virginia). Lincoln wanted to negotiate with the Confederacy, yet this brought no results and the Civil War ensued.

The North had more financial resources, better weapons and transportation and former slaves joined the army led by generals G. Ulysses Grant and G. Sherman.

The South had better soldiers and leaders. They were also more motivated at first. More battles took place in the South and they knew the territory better. The generals were G. Lee and G. Jackson.

1861 – the 1st battle was fought in **Fort Sumter**, Charleston.

1862 – Emancipation Proclamation was issued by Lincoln and meant that all slaves in the South were proclaimed free. From this point on, it was a war to free the slaves (before, it was a war to reunite the United States).

1863 – Battle at Vicksburg was a victory for the Union.

1863 – Battle at Gettysburg was a turning point: 50,000 soldiers died in three days and on the 4th day, the South surrendered.

1864 – Sherman's March to the Sea – Northern general Sherman walked with his army to the South and destroyed everything.

1865 – a peace treaty was signed in Appomattox (Virginia) and the 13th amendment was introduced: slavery was abolished. In the same year, Lincoln got assassinated by **Wilkes Booth** in the Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C.

1866 – 14th amendment was approved by Congress and ratified two years later according to which black people became free citizens and obtained the right to vote. However, segregation continued due to the **Ku Klux Klan** or other white supremacist groups.

WWI & THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS

The Great War (WWI) was fought between the **Allies** (Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, Romania, Japan and the United States) and the **Central Powers** (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire). At first, the USA did not want to interfere; the war should have been a European matter.

1915 – British passenger ship **Lusitania** was sunk by the Germans on its way from the USA and approximately 1,000 people died (of whom 128 were Americans).

1917 – more ships were sunk and then the **Zimmermann Telegram** changed everything. It was a secret diplomatic communication issued from the German Foreign Office that proposed a military alliance between Germany and Mexico if the US entered WWI against Germany. Thus, the USA decided to declare war on Germany.

11th November 1918 - the Armistice stopped the fighting on the Western Front.

1919 – The Treaty of Versailles formally ended the war between Germany and the Allied Nations.

Roaring 20s – the 1920s presented the Jazz Age (jazz, charleston,...). People wanted to have fun in order to forget the war. However, it was a decade of mass production and the motto “live now, pay tomorrow”. People also invested in shares and their prices were rising. Then, people started selling the shares:

24th October 1929 – Black Thursday – 13,000,000 shares sold.

29th October 1929 – Terrifying Tuesday – 15,000,000 shares sold and it was known as the **Wall Street Crash of 1929**. After that consumers did not have money to buy products, which led to overproduction and then an increase in unemployment.

1930s are said to be a hangover from the entertaining 1920s due to the **Great Depression** which came after the stock market crash.

1933 – Prohibition, which started in 1920, ended. It was a nationwide constitutional ban on the production, importation, transportation and sale of alcoholic beverages.

WW2 & THE USA AFTER WW2

The main combatants in WWII were the **Axis powers** (Germany, Italy, and Japan) and **the Allies** (France, Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union).

1939 – the war broke out in Europe but the USA did not want to interfere again. The same year, the **Manhattan Project**, which was a secret research and development of atomic bombs started.

1941 – the USA were sending military equipment and other goods to Britain for free.

1941 – the USA established an embargo on oil and gasoline exports to Japan.

7th December 1941 – the Japanese attacked the navy main base in Pearl Harbour.

8th December 1941 – the USA declared war on Japan and Hitler declared war on the USA.

6 June 1944 – American troops disembarked in Normandy (France) in **Operation Overlord** during World War II. Codenamed **Operation Neptune** and often referred to as **D-Day**, it was the largest seaborne invasion in history.

5th May 1945 – Germany surrendered.

6th August 1945 – an atomic bomb was dropped on **Hiroshima** and three days later on **Nagasaki** in Japan by the US army.

14th August 1945 – Japan surrendered too.

1947 – the USA proposed the **Marshall Plan**, which meant that the USA would financially support a destroyed Europe: loans to European countries were provided to help them recover their economies.

1947-1991 – **the Cold War** against the **Soviet Union** began because it was believed that this power posed a threat to the United States by its possession of the atomic bomb and by dominating Eastern Europe.

1950-1953 – US soldiers represented a major portion of the UN forces that fought in the **Korean War** on the side of South Korea against the North Korean and Chinese troops.

1953-1961 – while **Dwight Eisenhower's** policy (the 34th US president) concentrated predominantly on the Middle East, **John Fitzgerald Kennedy** (the 35th US president) had to confront the Soviet Union in Berlin where he was asked to end the Western occupation but refused to withdraw and thus forced the Soviets to build the **Berlin Wall** (August 1961).

1962 was the year of the **Cuban missile crisis**. It was a reaction to the installation of Soviet nuclear weapons on the island. Kennedy thought this too dangerous and responded with a naval quarantine. The threat of a nuclear holocaust was averted when **Nikita Khrushchev** agreed to ship the missiles back to the Soviet Union in exchange for an American promise never to attack Cuba and respect the revolutionary government led by **Fidel Castro**.

1961-1973 – the American involvement in the **Vietnam War** was later regarded as an unsuccessful military effort to resist the South Vietnamese **Vietcong troops** (who received help from the Northern **Ho Chi Minh's** regime). They failed to prevent them from taking all of the South. Both Kennedy* and **Lyndon B. Johnson** (the 36th and 37th president) hoped for victory and escalated the war but all these attempts proved to be in vain.

***November 22 1963** – Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. During his administration, the civil rights movement headed by **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, achieved many improvements for African Americans.

January 27 1973 – the cease-fire agreement was signed. The war was massively opposed at home and seen as purposeless.

1974 – the Watergate scandal was the investigation of the break-in into the offices of the **Democratic National Committee** in the **Watergate building**, which proved that President **Richard Nixon** (the 36th and 37th president) was involved in bribing witnesses and was withholding evidence regarding the break-in. On these grounds, he had to resign from office as the first president to do so. After the Watergate scandal, **Gerald R. Ford** (38th and 40th president) replaced his predecessor and had to deal with a serious economic recession.

April 29 1975 – Vietnam was united.

1979 – having overthrown the pro-American regime, revolutionaries in Iran stormed into the American embassy in Teheran and took the personnel as hostages. While the 444 days long Iranian hostage crisis troubled the then-president **Jimmy Carter** (the 39th president), Soviet troops marched into Afghanistan.

1983 – the Strategic Defense Initiative (known as the "Star Wars program") was intended to defend the US from attack from Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles by intercepting the missiles at various phases of their flight. It was introduced under **Ronald Reagan** (the 40th president).

1986 – the Iran-Contra affair revealed secret aid from the American government to the counter-revolutionaries in Nicaragua. Although explicitly prohibited by Congress, the money which was obtained from selling arms to Iran was still being sent to the Nicaraguan Contras (various US-backed and funded right-wing rebel groups). The hearings proved that Reagan's government had been withholding information from the public. Throughout this time, many meetings between Reagan and **Mikhail Gorbachev** (**Reykjavik 1986, Washington 1987 and Moscow 1988**) set the course of reducing strategic weapons.

1988 – Gorbachev began to withdraw the Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

1990-1991 – the Persian Gulf War was handled by Reagan's successor, **George Bush** (the 41st president). **Operation Desert Storm** in 1991 began with a massive bombing of Saddam Hussein's armies in Iraq and Kuwait. UN troops, which were comprised mostly of US soldiers, defeated the Iraqi army.

1992 – in the presidential elections, **Bill Clinton** from the Democratic party received the most votes and became the youngest president (the 42nd president) in office since JFK.

11 September 2001 – 19 militants associated with the Islamic extremist group **al Qaeda** hijacked four planes and carried out suicide attacks against targets in the United States. Two of the planes were flown into the twin towers of the **World Trade Center** in New York City, a third plane hit the **Pentagon** just outside Washington, D.C., and the fourth plane crashed in a field in **Shanksville**, Pennsylvania. Almost 3,000 people were killed during the **9/11 terrorist attacks**, which triggered major U.S. initiatives to combat terrorism and defined the presidency of George W. Bush (the 43rd president).