



Before Europeans arrived in North America, tens of millions of people (Native Americans) from hundreds of different societies (tribes) speaking several thousand languages lived in what is now the United States.

Europeans brought new diseases which killed the vast majority of Native Americans, though many others were killed in conflicts over land with the European colonists and later, the American government. Today, 562 different tribes are recognized, with over five million Native Americans living either in cities or in special autonomous zones called reservations.

From the 1600s-1800s, Europeans enslaved about 12 million people from Africa, bringing over 600,000 of them to what is now the United States. There, many were forbidden from speaking their languages, practicing their culture and religion, and were forcibly separated from their families. These Americans of African descent (Black or African-Americans) endured centuries of forced labor and discrimination. Despite these hardships, they greatly enriched the United States with their ingenuity, hard work, culture, music, and food.

In the 1600s and 1700s, European immigrants to North America came mostly from Britain, seeking religious freedom and economic opportunity. In the mid-19th century, a second wave of Europeans from Ireland, Germany and Scandinavia began to arrive, fleeing famine, political conflict and religious persecution. In the late 19th century, a wave of Southern and Eastern Europeans (Italians, Greeks, Poles, and Jews) arrived.

In the 20th century, migration to the United States from Mexico and Central America, as well as from China and Korea, became popular. Each wave of migrants faced mistrust and discrimination from more established communities, but the country adapted as each wave of migrants brought their unique skills and talents, and these migrants found their own paths to becoming American.

TIMELINE



1492

Columbus lands in Caribbean, begins new era of colonization



1621

Native Americans teach ill-equipped English Pilgrims how to plant and survive winter, then share a feast.



1775-1783

The American Revolution
13 colonies win war of independence from Britain



1776

July 4th
Declaration of Independence



1861 - 1865

Civil War over slavery between the Northern Union and the Southern Confederacy



The United States fought a Civil War in the 1860s over slavery. The southern states' economies were agricultural and used slave labor kidnapped from Africa. Northern states' economies were more industrialized and because of their machines, they did not need as many people to be as productive. The war was the deadliest in U.S. history, but though it ended slavery, it did not end racism. The U.S. government continued to officially promote racism until the 1950s, and the legacy of racism continues to have negative consequences particularly for Black Americans.

Washington, D.C. is the capital city. This is where the legislature (Congress), the President, and the Supreme Court are all located. The land was originally donated by the states of Virginia and Maryland in 1790, though the portion in Virginia was returned to that state in 1847 to address concerns about equal voting rights there.

The United States maintained a policy of isolationism until the 20th century, when it entered World War I (over the objections of most Americans) and World War II. Following World War II, the United States decided that it was safer to play an active role in maintaining global security and helped establish institutions like the United Nations, NATO, and the World Bank.

Notes:



TIMELINE



1917

The USA joins WWI.



1933 - 1935

The New Deal provides the first U.S. social safety net, following the Great Depression.



1941

Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, and the USA enters WWII.



1945 - 1991

Cold War



1965 - 1974

Vietnam War, Hippies in the 60s, Watergate scandal