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SOCIETY & VALUES

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Editor, *eJournal USA*
IIP/T/CP
U.S. Department of State
301 4th Street SW
Washington, DC 20547
United States of America
E-mail: iiptcp@state.gov

About This Issue

Type the phrase "United States" into the Google search engine and 3,370,000,000 listings come up on the computer screen. Clearly, there is no shortage of published content about this country. As we researched this issue of *eJournal USA*, however, we realized that a new publication, tailored to the current generation of young people from outside the United States, could fill a niche. Our title for this issue, "Snapshot USA," conveys this approach. We offer some fundamental facts and build on these to describe a little of how Americans think about their country and the world, to provide a picture of who we are now.

Our goal is for international readers to become aware not just that California is the most populous state but also that U.S. democracy runs on a system of checks and balances, that the feelings young Americans have as they venture into adulthood may be similar to the readers' own, and much more. In short, we do not see this issue as an academic tome but as an intriguing slice of America at a moment in time, a word-and-picture collage for June of 2006.

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The Statue of Liberty

We open with a collection of short essays called "My America." We asked five young writers to tell what they'd like people abroad to know about this country—aspects of America that, in the daily rush of headlines around the world, may have been overlooked. Their thoughts make for some surprising reading.

In "Some Things That Make Us American," Northwestern University political scientist Kenneth Janda pinpoints pluralism as one key to American democracy. A scholar of international relations from American University in Washington, DC, Gary Weaver, explains further that the common metaphor of America as a melting pot where different ethnic groups lose their identities is not accurate. He prefers the symbol of a mosaic or a tapestry—a society that comprises a larger unity while at the same time valuing its distinct parts. We close this section with portraits of five contemporary Americans whose lives seem to embody some of the classic values associated with this country—self-reliance, entrepreneurship, philanthropy, second chances, and pursuing one's dream.

In "American Icons," we take a look at 32 statesmen, civil rights leaders, scientists, entrepreneurs, athletes, and entertainers whose achievements have also touched many around the world. To understand any nation, you need to understand something of its past, so we also include a listing of milestone events in U.S. history.

We follow with a brief tour of the country's regions. This seems appropriate because one of the earliest and most enduring of American dreams has been about the vast land itself. Walt Whitman expressed the thought in his 1855 preface to his poetry collection, *Leaves of Grass*. The true poet of America, Whitman wrote, "incarnates its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes. … When the long Atlantic coast stretches longer and the Pacific coast stretches longer … He spans between them also from east to west and reflects what is between them." ■

The Editors

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My America

Defining what it means to be an American has been a matter of discussion among Americans from the country's earliest days. Many of these efforts at looking inward, however, have a way of spinning outward to engage the rest of the world in a kind of dialogue. In his famous 1841 essay "Self-Reliance," for example, Ralph Waldo Emerson defines this virtue in opposition to the past, especially the European past. "Insist on yourself," Emerson said. "Never imitate."

One can see something of the same sensibility in the essays that follow in this section called "My America." We invited five young writers from around the United States—of varying backgrounds, occupations, marital status—to write about what they thought was important to tell international readers of their own age about this country. These essays, we thought, could provide a deeper, fuller picture of the USA and its people than may be conveyed through Hollywood movies or international TV news.

Many of these essays do begin by looking inward and then move on to consider the world. Jacqueline Morais Easley, a naturalized U.S. citizen, marvels at the diverse families that live on her block and explains her reasons for treasuring the way her daughter colors outside the lines. Korey London, an ex-serviceman, tells why he believes in defending this country. Ashley Moore, a magazine editor in New York City, far from her Texas home on her first job out of college, reflects that her small apartment and empty refrigerator are a long way from the American dream. Eboo Patel, the Muslim head of an interfaith council in Chicago, tells why he thinks his religion and America's tradition of tolerance reinforce each other.

Kelly McWilliams, a college freshman who is well aware of what a fellow essayist calls "the tragic, terrible parts of American history," explains her motives for choosing to live in this constantly self-correcting land. She takes Frederick Douglass, the former slave who became the country's leading abolitionist, as her model, pointing out that Douglass made the decision to stay in the United States and wage an internal political struggle against slavery. "America can be made and re-made to fit its people," this 18-year-old writes. "It is willing. It is waiting. And for as long as this remains true, I will be American." ■

My America: Coloring Outside the Lines

Jacqueline Morais Easley

Jacqueline Easley lives with her husband and two daughters in Columbia, Maryland. She is a freelance writer.

Courtesy of Jacqueline Morais Easley

Jacqueline Easley and her family in their backyard.

What do the faces of today's American family look like to you? Do you picture tall, athletic blond parents and their 2.5 children? Perhaps they stand in front of a pretty house on a well-manicured lawn surrounded by a white picket fence? Inside the home there are McDonald's bags on the kitchen counter, Coca-Colas in the refrigerator, and MTV playing in the background.

Sure, that's one type of American family. And I would be lying if I said I pictured that American family any differently as an 11-year-old girl living in the Philippines back in 1985. When my father came home one day from his job at the Asian Development Bank and announced we were moving to America, I was speechless … and then exhilarated.

The funny thing was that, at the time, McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and MTV were the only parts of America that meant anything to me. And if these three symbols were any indication of what might be available in larger amounts, then how fabulous America must be!

My family made that move to America. And 20 years later, here I am—a little less naïve, a little more savvy to media advertising, now favoring sushi over Filet-o-Fish and a good bottle of red wine over Coca-Cola. I don't even watch MTV anymore. But one thing hasn't changed: I remain a diehard fan of the United States.

I became an American citizen just five years ago when I was pregnant with my first child. I had married my college sweetheart and after a brief stint in Chicago, we were settling down in Maryland.

Today, as I do my best to raise two bold, beautiful, and rebellious little girls, I thank God that I am able to do it in the United States. And I still remember that day of citizenship well—reciting the pledge of allegiance, holding my hand over my heart, feeling both my baby kick inside of me and this overwhelming pride that I was officially becoming an American.

Five years later, the possibilities for my daughters are endless. We are quite aware that they live a comfortable, privileged life. While this is in part due to the hard work of my husband and myself, and our parents before us, it is also certainly due to sheer luck. My husband and I have drawn a fortunate lot in life. We were both born to loving parents who stressed the importance of family bonds, education, hard work, and commitment to others. These same values are now the backbone of our own little family and they propel us into the future.

My husband and I try to raise our children in ways that help them understand how privileged they are. We teach our girls to appreciate the talents and resources they have and do their best to use them for the betterment of others. If our lives have good food and much entertainment, they are also filled with charity and community service, children's books about different cultures and lifestyles, and endless motherly lectures on tolerance and diversity and compassion.

I applaud the fact that the American Dream is not a hokey, unattainable delusion; it is something that I see not just within my family but among friends, neighbors, and strangers who strive for their version of this dream on a daily basis. To me, the faces of the American family include those blond, athletic parents with their 2.5 kids on their well-manicured lawns I mentioned earlier, but there are many, many other kinds of faces in my own personal spectrum as well.

There are the faces of the families at my co-op preschool: the petite red-headed Irish girl with her African-American husband and gorgeous kids; the two women raising three children together; the single mother who holds two jobs and raises a family on her own. There are other diverse faces on my neighborhood cul-de-sac: the Iraqi man married to an

American woman with their two kids, our babysitter with her Italian father and Iranian mother, the Korean psychologist and his wife. Diversity is alive and rampant—at least in my life.

I cannot help but remember that initial act of rebellion over two hundred years ago that cemented the independent spirit of this future "land of immigrants." Under the umbrella of that independent spirit, millions of immigrants came to this country seeking shelter from intolerance, prejudice, and persecution—craving freedom and longing for the right to live authentic lives that were truly their own.

Sometimes I cringe when I think about the tragic, terrible parts of America's fledgling history. But name me any country, culture, religion, or individual that does not have bad parts along with the good. And of course there are things about this country that make me angry or embarrassed or disillusioned at times. Yet this is true of so many of the good things in life—marriage, parenthood, careers, relatives, friendships.

In the end, what saddens me about America is nothing compared to what amazes me about it: how much this young country has accomplished in so little time; how it champions democracy and human rights around the world; how it has attained economic superpower status; how it continues to dazzle with "bigger, better, brighter" ideas even as it doles out money to help those in need overseas.

I do question certain superficial values often associated with America and do my best to downplay these with my daughters, but I cherish even more the greater values of independence and diversity and freedom of expression that are alive and well in this country. And you can bet these take center stage as my husband and I navigate the complicated road of American parenthood.

Americans celebrate the individual, and as a result, our country is filled with some truly unique, bizarre, singularly talented, overly opinionated, exceptionally driven, multi-faceted people. My daughters, with their own distinct personalities, are various parts girly-girls, tomboy athletes, bookworms, budding artists, and compassionate citizens of the world. Of course I celebrate all these sides—and the ones not yet discovered—as best I can.

Americans also revere the act of self-exploration—discovering oneself, peeling back the layers to find your true essence, trying anything and everything at least once. Some may find this self-exploration a little indulgent. But when I see my five-year-old daughter coloring outside the lines, I do not try to correct her. Instead I feel a sense of pride bubbling up inside that she's unwilling to conform or follow the rules … just yet. I admire her decision to reject borders in favor of something a little more messy, bohemian, and potentially progressive.

OK, it's just a coloring book, but my point is that when Americans strive for the best, it's not just because we are competitive but because we are constantly rebelling, pushing boundaries, taking risks. And we do this because we are encouraged to do this by virtue of the land in which we live and all that it stands for.

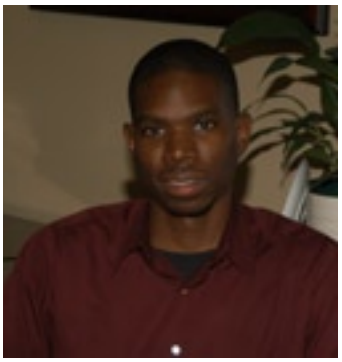
We all have the freedom to be shy or extroverted, brainy or ditzy, stylish or schlumpy, old-fashioned or avant-garde. We can worry about what people think, conform, and fit in if we want to. Or we can care less about who's watching, stand up and shout from the rooftops, make waves and push buttons, threaten the status quo. I look forward to seeing what my daughters choose to do. I may cringe at some of the things they take on in the spirit of self-expression. But for now, I'll let them color outside the lines—better yet, I'll cheer them on for it. ■

The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.

My America: An Airman's Story

Korey London

Korey London, a former serviceman with the U.S. Air Force, recently graduated from Augusta College in Augusta, Georgia, and is currently assistant director of public relations at Paine College, also in Augusta.



Courtesy of Korey London

When I was in elementary school, I remember listening to my teachers give history lessons about people, from mostly European countries, who wanted to come to the United States to find a better way of life during the early 1900s. The people who were able to purchase tickets and make the trip to the United States were called immigrants. The rumor was that America was the land of opportunity and had streets paved with gold.

I've never come across any of those streets, but there's always been plenty of opportunity in this country for those willing to take advantage of it.

I also remember history lessons about people who were captured on the west coast of Africa and shipped to the United States, South America, and the Caribbean Islands in the slave trade. I remember hearing about the horrible living conditions that these Africans experienced on the long crossing to the New World. I also remember the stories of cruelty that the Africans endured before the institution of slavery was abolished in the United States. I wondered how anyone could survive such difficult times. But they did. Sometimes, when I look at my own black skin, I wonder if I could have survived in those conditions. Then I thank God I didn't have to go through what my ancestors did.

So when I think of America, I often think of past generations of people who came to the United States in search of opportunities to improve their lives and also those who were brought here under the bondage of slavery and endured until better days came. Both groups overcame hardships and worked to prepare the younger generations to take advantage of better opportunities once they arrived.

The question, "What is an American?" is kind of tricky because, with the exception of Native Americans, we all come from countries outside the United States or, at least, our ancestors do.

My family is no different. My parents are from two tiny islands in the Caribbean West Indies. My mom is from Guadeloupe and my dad is from St. Maarten. They first met each other in St. Maarten when they were teenagers. They moved to the United States at different times in the late 1960s. When my mom arrived in New York and settled in, she found out that my dad was already here. Somehow she was able to find him and the rest, as they say, is history.

My dad eventually joined the U. S. Army and served for 20 years. His military career provided our family with a fairly comfortable life and allowed us to see parts of the world we probably wouldn't have visited otherwise. My brother enlisted in the U.S. Air Force when I was still in high school and I joined the Air Force after a year of college. At this point I have finished my commitment to the military and I'm almost finished with my college education, which was paid for by the military. In addition to the education I'm getting, I have several positive memories from serving my country in the U.S. Air Force.

I was fortunate enough to have one of the best jobs in the Air Force—working in the public affairs offices putting base newspapers together. The job allowed me to learn what other airmen in the service were doing to make sure the United States was safe and that help was available to those in need.

One of the more memorable experiences was when I traveled to a small remote village inside the Arctic Circle to help media from Anchorage, Alaska, cover a story about an airlift squadron's delivery of power generators and other supplies to the Alaskan Natives who lived there. The delivery was an annual event that took place a few weeks before Christmas. The best part was seeing how appreciative the people in that village were to receive the supplies and equipment. Helping that village of Alaskan Natives was a typical day's work to the airmen involved in making the delivery. Those airmen were living the Air Force core values: Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All That We Do.

That's why it's difficult for me to watch the news or read a newspaper to find out about American soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen who've been killed in Iraq. I consider myself a patriot for the United States and joined the military

to serve and protect my country, but my greatest reason for joining the military wasn't to go out and kill people. I wanted to earn money for my education and receive training for a career outside of the military. That's the reason a lot of the airmen I served with told me they joined the military. When I see those reports about the members of the military who've lost their lives, I know that it could have just as easily been me returning home in one of those body bags. But that's part of the sacrifice this new generation of military men and women have made so future generations won't have to endure another September 11 disaster. ■

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My America: The City and the Dream

Ashley Moore

Ashley Moore is a recent graduate of Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. Currently working for Brides.com Local Print, a division of Condé Nast publishers in New York City, she hopes to return to Texas someday.

Courtesy of Ashley Moore

In our younger years we were taught about the American Dream. "America is the land of opportunity," our teachers would say, "where the fruits of this good nation are obtainable with hard work and determination." Row after row of bright-eyed young Americans, we peered into the pages of history textbooks, staring at photos of those who came to our country seeking the life of fortune. For the throngs of immigrants arriving by the boatloads in the early 20th century, that meant a steady job, food on the table, and the ability to provide for one's family. As we read on, we learned the secrets to a good fortune: If at the end of a hard day's work there was something to show for it, such as food on the table or money in the bank, you were living the dream.

Of course there were setbacks—plenty of them. As we grew older, advancing in our studies, our textbooks revealed the adversities that challenged so many of America's dreamers. Many of the hard times were economically driven and some were racially driven. But the dream continued to live on despite the upsets. Over the years it gained speed, persistently inspiring the faces of our country. And today we are still intoxicated by the idea of each of us becoming our own American success.

It's been several years since I've looked at textbooks from my school days. It's been even longer since I thought about the history lessons. But lately, I've given those days some thought, flirting with the idea of my own dream. I live in New York City just blocks from neighborhoods where a hundred years ago immigrants shed blood and tears in their quest for fortune and the good life. As an aspiring, young writer, I haven't shed blood, but there have been some tears. I guess that makes me kin to earlier immigrants in this city because I can't seem to give up, call the stops, or let my knees buckle.

Each day I embark into the city. It's dark and disfigured, jarring out temptations and distractions. And, it's not even winter. But at the end of the day, after I've spent many hours at a day job writing for a magazine and at a night job waiting tables, the dream keeps telling me I will have something to show for these efforts someday. But what, I ask my tired self? A small studio apartment no bigger than my parent's living room back home? Or could it be the empty refrigerator that crystallizes a lonely block of cheese?

"America is the land of opportunity," our teachers would tell me again, "where the fruits of this good nation are obtainable with hard work and determination." There is a beautiful naiveté to that school lesson. As children we will believe anything and continue to believe it until we're told not to. At its core, the American dream is childlike, too. As we grow older, at times disquieted by fear of never receiving good fortune, the dream remains relentless, continuous, yet to be stopped.

My fortune may never be fancy cars or a penthouse apartment. It may also—I must admit to myself—never be to become a writer. But still the dream continues to inspire, so that one day I am confident I will be my own American success. ■

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My America: The New World

Eboo Patel

Eboo Patel is executive director of the Interfaith Youth Core in Chicago, Illinois. He is a leader in the interfaith movement.

Courtesy of Eboo Patel

I love America not because I am under the illusion that it is perfect, but because it allows me—the child of Muslim immigrants from India—to participate in its progress, to carve a place in its promise, to play a role in its possibility.

John Winthrop, one of the earliest European settlers in America, gave voice to this sense of possibility. He told his compatriots that their society would be like a city upon a hill, a beacon for the world. It was a hope rooted in Winthrop's Christian faith, and no doubt he imagined his city on a hill with a steeple in the center. Throughout the centuries, America has remained a deeply religious country while at the same time becoming a remarkably plural one. Indeed, we are the most religiously devout nation in the West and the most religiously diverse country in the world. The steeple at the center of the city on a hill is now surrounded by the minaret of Muslim mosques, the Hebrew script of Jewish synagogues, the chanting of Buddhist sangas, and the statues of Hindu temples. In fact, there are now more Muslims in America than Episcopalians, the faith professed by many of America's Founding Fathers.

One hundred years ago, the great African-American scholar W.E.B. DuBois warned that the problem of the century would be the color line. The 21st century might well be dominated by a different line—the faith line. From Northern Ireland to South Asia, the Middle East to Middle America, people are condemning, coercing, and killing in the name of God. The most pressing questions for my country (America), my religion (Islam), and all God's people may well be these: How will people who may have different ideas of heaven interact together on Earth? Will the steeple, the minaret, the synagogue, the temple, and the sanga learn to share space in a new city on a hill?

I think the American ethos—mixing tolerance and reverence—may have something special to contribute to this issue.

America is a grand gathering of souls, the vast majority from elsewhere. The American genius lies in allowing these souls to contribute their texture to the American tradition, to add new notes to the American song.

I am an American with a Muslim soul. My soul carries a long history of heroes, movements, and civilizations that sought to submit to the will of God. My soul listened as the Prophet Muhammad preached the central messages of Islam, tazaaqa and tawhid, compassionate justice and the oneness of God. In the Middle Ages, my soul spread to the East and West, praying in the mosques and studying in the libraries of the great medieval Muslim cities of Cairo, Baghdad, and Cordoba. My soul whirled with Rumi, read Aristotle with Averroes, traveled through Central Asia with Nasir Khusrow. In the colonial era, my Muslim soul was stirred to justice. It marched with Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Khudai Khidmatgars in their satyagraha to free India. It stood with Farid Esack, Ebrahim Moosa, Rahid Omar, and the Muslim Youth Movement in their struggle for a multicultural South Africa.

In one eye I carry this ancient Muslim vision on pluralism, in the other eye I carry the American promise. And in my heart, I pray that we make real this possibility: a city on a hill where different religious communities respectfully share space and collectively serve the common good; a world where diverse nations and peoples come to know one another in a spirit of brotherhood and righteousness; a century in which we achieve a common life together. ■

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My America: The Meaning of America

Kelly McWilliams

Kelly McWilliams grew up in Los Angeles, California, and Phoenix, Arizona, before attending Walnut Hill School, a boarding school for the arts in Massachusetts. In 2004, she published Doormat*, her first novel, for young adults. Next year she will be a freshman at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, where she plans to continue her study of literature.*

Courtesy of Kelly McWilliams

I am a California baby who crossed the continent to Boston. Here, on the eastern seaboard, everything is utterly different from what I knew, culturally, as a landscape, and as a home, and yet I recognize it as American. I often imagine the 3,000 miles in between my first home and my new one, the incredible expanse, the fields, the western cities, the mountains, the mines, the houses rich and poor, the million different voices, the different languages, and know that all that, too, is American.

What is America? For myself I call it home, though I am aware that it is not always so, for everyone. It was not always home even for my ancestors. Because I am mulatto, mixed black and white, I know that America is a country malleable as gold that can be made our own, if words strike it hard enough. Frederick Douglass, famous abolitionist and escaped American slave, and a writer whom I will always love, used his words to convert our country, first his prison, into his home. Because words are powerful here, and because our constitution demands that they cannot be silenced, I am a writer. I am American.

Already, I have crossed an X in the sand, in place of my name, to mark that this ground, however imperfect it has been or may be, is the ground that I will work until my bones are dust. History beckons that we work to make the land yield the truths on which human souls subsist: freedom, opportunity, and the right to struggle even against our own country's wrongs. I am not afraid for America as long as I know that we as citizens are listening.

Recently I have wondered why more Americans don't cry out against wrongs, why there is silence, even if it lasts only a moment. But always the rumble in the ground begins, the news sets itself a new challenge to print, and we begin to answer for our part in history. At this moment people of conscience are beginning to speak out against injustice that we have fallen into overseas. Guantánamo Bay will mark a dark period for us as a nation. International policies I can't believe in personally challenge my optimism. But I remember that the people are the poets of this nation. They will see to it that our country always wakes from its nightmares.

Frederick Douglass wrote not only to change America for our people, but also because he loved it. He did not go to Canada as so many slaves did. He stayed on the East Coast, near Boston, near where I live now, and traveled, broadcasting the words he wrote, casting them like seeds that took root. After his example, I believe with all my heart, young and untenable as it may be, that America can be made and re-made to fit its people. It is willing. It is waiting. And for as long as this remains true, I will be American. ■

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The American People by the Numbers

Statistical Abstract of the United States
http://www.census.gov/statab/www/

Population (estimate, June 6, 2006, see http://www.census.gov)	298,346,797
Population (2004 estimate)	293,655,404
Persons Under 18 Years of Age (2004 estimate)	25%
Persons 65 Years Old and Older (2004 estimate)	12.4%
Female Persons (2004 estimate)	50.8%
White Persons (2004 estimate)	80.4%
Black or African-American Persons (2004 estimate)	12.8%
American-Indian or Alaska-Native Persons (2004 estimate))	1.0%
Asian Persons (2004 estimate)	4.2%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (2004 estimate)	0.2%
Persons Reporting Two or More Races (2004 estimate)	1.5%
White Persons, Not of Hispanic/Latino Origin (2004 estimate)	67.4%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino Origin (2004 estimate)	14.1%
Language Other Than English Spoken in the Home (2003)	18.4%
High School Graduates (percent of persons age 25+, 2004)	85%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher (percent of persons age 25+, 2004)	28%
Persons With Disability (age 5+, updated 14 April 2004)	12.5%
Homeownership Rate (2004)	69%
Persons Per Household (2004)	2.57
Persons Below Poverty Level (2003)	12.5%
Legal Immigrants (2004)	946,000
Illegal Immigrants (2004, estimate)	7,000,000
Foreign-Born Population (2003)	11.9%
Changed Residences (2003-2004)	13.3%

- Most Populous State (2004)—California, with 35,894,000 residents
- Least Populous State (2004)—Wyoming, with 507,000 residents
- Fastest-Growing State From 2000-2004—Nevada, 16.8% increase
- Most Urban State (2004)—New Jersey
- Largest Metropolitan Area—New York City/New Jersey with 18,710,000 residents
- City With the Most Foreign-Born Residents—San Jose, California, with 40.5%

Pluralism and Democracy

KENNETH JANDA

Kenneth Janda is a professor of political science at Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois.

Compared with other democracies, the United States has a very decentralized structure of government. The Framers of the U.S. Constitution were extremely wary of the potential dangers of concentrating power in any single political institution, and so deliberately undertook to divide authority among different branches and levels of government. The decentralized American system contrasts with the strict "majoritarian" model of democracy, which holds that government should enact legislation and pursue policies that are immediately responsive to what the majority of the people want.

The American model of democratic government, pluralist democracy, has a number of advantages over the majoritarian model, and these reflect the Founders' vision for America. Pluralist democracy requires government power to be dispersed and authority to be decentralized. According to this model, democracy exists when government authority is divided among multiple centers of power that are open to interests of various groups—for example, labor v. management, farmers v. food stores, coal companies v. environmentalists. Groups like these compete against each other in a pluralistic society.

AP/WWP

The U.S. Capitol is the seat of the federal government. The Supreme Court building is seen in the upper right.

The dispersion of authority in pluralist theory prevents government from taking hasty, possibly imprudent action, but it also can prevent any action if important power centers disagree. Although decentralization of power characterizes American government, some institutional features tend to centralize power, enabling government to act even while lacking universal agreement on policy. This essay describes how key features of the U.S. political system contribute to achieving a balance of decentralization and centralization of political authority.

Distrust of Central Authority

As subjects of King George III, the people in the original 13 British colonies distrusted the strong central government that directed their lives from abroad, and they rebelled against British rule in 1775. Their Declaration of Independence of 1776 charged the King with "absolute tyranny over these States." While fighting their war of independence, the colonists formed the United States of America under the Articles of Confederation, a document that created little more than an alliance among the rebel states. The colonists won their independence in 1781—the same year the Articles were finally ratified and took effect.

The confederation's governmental weaknesses became apparent after the war. Power was too dispersed: The confederation itself had no authority to tax; it had no leader with executive powers; it could not regulate commerce; and unanimous consent was needed to amend the document. In 1787, delegates gathered in Philadelphia to revise the Articles, but they wrote an entirely new charter, the Constitution of the United States of America. The Constitution did not create a government with strong central authority, however. The delegates still sought a decentralized government but one with more central coordination than granted under the Articles of Confederation. The new governmental structure struck a balance between centralization and decentralization—resulting in a lasting government that has worked well for over 200 years.

Decentralizing Features

Many features of the American political system promote the decentralization of power. Four of the most important features embedded in the Constitution are (1) federalism, (2) separation of powers, (3) a bicameral Congress with chambers of equal weight, and (4) the electoral systems—for there are two different systems.

(1) Federalism

The Framers of the Constitution replaced the confederation model of government with a federal model. Whereas the Articles of Confederation promised a "perpetual Union" of states that retained their "sovereignty, freedom, and independence," the Constitution does not mention sovereignty at all. It begins, "We the people of the United States," implying that the new government represented individuals rather than states. Under the concept of federalism, two or more levels of government exercise power and authority over the same people and the same territory. For example, the national government provides for defense against foreign enemies while state governments exercise "police power"—safeguarding citizens' health, morals, safety, and welfare. The national government can act in these areas only with state cooperation. The national government might offer funds for state highways built to national standards, or grant funds for education if state schools followed certain procedures. Because the police powers are decentralized among the states, the power of the national government is limited in building highways, improving schools, or in regulating marriage, divorce, and criminal punishment—all of which, among other matters, are decentralized under state control.

AP/WWP

Afghan President Hamid Karzai speaks to a joint session of Congress.

(2) Separation of Powers

The Constitution created a structure that separated political powers among three branches of government. It invested "all legislative Powers" in the Congress, "the executive Power" in the President, and "the judicial Power" in a Supreme Court and in inferior courts established by Congress. In addition, the Constitution decentralized authority further, devising ways by which each branch could check the other branches. One example: Congress was granted the power to make laws, but the president was empowered to veto laws; whereupon Congress could by a two-thirds vote pass a law over a presidential veto. Another example: Only the president can negotiate treaties, but treaties cannot be put into effect unless approved by two-thirds of the Senate. Yet one more example: While Congress determines the Supreme Court's structure and the president names the Court justices, the Court can invalidate acts by Congress and the president if the Court judges that the acts conflict with the Constitution. As regards this last example, it is important to note that the Court's power to invalidate acts by Congress and the president was not expressly provided for in the Constitution; this became accepted practice only following the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Marbury v. Madison*, decided in 1803.

This complex separation of powers contributes to the decentralization of government authority in the United States. The president may propose a governmental program but Conressional legislation is generally required to enact that program into law. Even then, the Supreme Court has the power to reject the law if it comes before the court. Enacting permanent law in the United States is a complicated process. Lawmaking is simpler in nations with parliamentary systems—which are far more common among the world's democracies. The dominant party or coalition in parliament usually passes legislation proposed by government ministers, and most courts have limited power to invalidate the legislation.

(3) A Bicameral Congress

Decentralization of power in the U.S. legislative process is furthered by a bicameral Congress. Many nations also have bicameral legislatures—legislatures with two

chambers (often called lower and upper houses)—but few countries have two chambers that are virtually equal in power. The House of Representatives qualifies as the lower house because its 435 members are elected from districts based on population size. The smaller Senate (100 members) qualifies as the upper house because its members must be older (at least 30 compared with age 25 for the House) and are elected for longer terms: six years instead of two. Although senators are popularly elected, two are chosen (in staggered terms) from each of the 50 states, regardless of population.

According to the Constitution, the two chambers do have minor differences in powers. All revenue bills must originate in the House, and only the Senate approves treaties and presidential appointments. These differences fade in comparison with their equal powers in enacting legislation. Before a bill can be presented to the president for signature, it must pass each chamber in identical form. As a result, power is not concentrated in one chamber more than the other (as in most nations) but apportioned equally to each chamber.

AP/WWP

Ohio's delegation to the electoral college vote at the Statehouse in Columbus, Ohio, on December 13, 2004.

(4) Electoral Systems

The United States has not one electoral system, but two—one for the president and one for members of Congress. Both systems contribute to the decentralization of power. Let's consider the presidential system first. The presidential election is not a "national" election that a candidate wins by taking a majority of the popular vote across the nation. It is a federal election that awards the presidency to the candidate who wins a majority (270) of 538 electors in the "electoral college." (The number 538 derives from the sizes of the House of Representatives and Senate plus three votes held by the District of Columbia.) States have one electoral vote for each of their electors, and each state has as many electors as seats in Congress. The smallest states (with only one representative and two senators) have only three electoral votes. The largest state, California, has 55. Voters in presidential elections actually vote for party slates of electors in each state. After the election, the electors in each state meet in their state capitols to choose a president. (The electoral college never meets as a whole.) A candidate who wins a plurality of a state's vote wins all the state's electors. Therefore, presidential candidates decentralize their campaigns, directing them at individual states, not the nation as a whole.

The electoral system for Congress also encourages decentralization. Most other democracies elect legislators using proportional voting: Votes are cast for parties, and legislative seats are awarded in proportion to the party vote. The United States elects members of Congress using majority voting: Multiple candidates contest for a single seat, and the seat goes to the candidate who receives the most votes. Because they win office by winning elections on their own, members of Congress cater to their states and districts to be re-elected, which encourages them to serve local interests if they conflict with national interests.

Centralizing Features

Federalism, separation of powers, bicameralism, and the electoral system all contribute to the decentralization of power in the United States, which serves the model of pluralist democracy. Dividing political authority, however, carries risks that government may be unable to act at all or will act to serve the interests of organized minorities rather than the majority of the people. As noted earlier, the Framers of the Constitution were primarily concerned with dividing and checking government authority. Over time, certain institutional changes took place that they may not have anticipated, and which contributed to a greater centralization of governmental authority. Three such institutional changes deserve special notice: (1) the presidency, (2) the two-party system, and (3) the Supreme Court.

(1) The Presidency

The Framers of the Constitution devoted more than 2,200 words to the legislative branch in Article I. They describe the executive branch with barely 1,000 words in Article II. The presidency was viewed by many of the Framers as an administrative office needed to execute laws conceived and passed by Congress. Over time, however, the presidency became the central focus of American government. The president now defines national goals, proposes legislation to achieve those goals, sends Congress a budget to fund national legislation, and, of course, speaks for the nation in global affairs. Responding to national and international crises, presidents have—usually with the cooperation of Congress—expanded the powers of the office so that now it is the institution most attentive to national public opinion. In that sense, the presidency functions more in keeping with the majoritarian model of democracy.

(2) The Two-Party System

Political parties did not exist in 1787. In fact, the Constitution awarded the presidency to the candidate who won a majority of the electoral votes and the vice-presidency to the runner-up. Two party groups had formed in Congress by the election of 1796, and they backed opposing presidential candidates. The winner, John Adams (a Federalist), had to accept his opponent, Thomas Jefferson (a Democratic Republican), as his vice-president. A constitutional amendment in 1804 recognized the rise of parties by requiring that electors vote separately for president and vice-president, which led to party "tickets" for both offices. Moreover, the development of opposing parties in both houses of Congress encouraged coordination between the chambers. The party that claimed the president promoted coordination between the presidency and Congress. That only two parties have dominated American politics for most of its history also contributes to the centralization of power. American politics revolves around the Democratic and Republican parties, which serve alternatively in government and in opposition. Because minor parties wield very little power in the United States, the two-party system contributes to the centralization of authority.

AP/WWP

President George W. Bush signs a presidential proclamation in honor of the fourth anniversary of the USA Freedom Corps in the Oval Office of the White House in January 2006. The White House created the corps after the 2001 terrorist attacks in order to promote and expand volunteer service in America.

(3) The Supreme Court

The Framers of the Constitution provided for a Supreme Court but did not have a clear vision of how it would function in their new government. Its description in Article III consists of fewer than 400 words and does not say much about the Court's power. In 1803, the Court in a unanimous decision asserted the power of judicial review—the authority to review laws passed by Congress to determine whether they are in keeping with the U.S. Constitution. As a result of this decision, the Court's status rose within the political system. It also gave the Court the last word about controversial governmental action. The court has contributed to the centralization of authority by acting as the final arbiter of decisions in a system of divided powers.

Conclusion

Because power is so decentralized among government institutions, the U.S. system can be said to fall short of the highest standard of majoritarian democracy. Because of the decentralization of power, however, the United States admirably fulfills the gold standard of pluralist democracy, which assumes multiple centers of power. The U.S. political system is open to competing groups seeking to be heard in the democratic process, and arguably yields policy outcomes that, over time, more effectively take the interests and concerns of different groups into account than do systems founded on the strict majoritarian principle. ■

The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.

U.S.A. FAQs

What is the significance of the stars and stripes in the U.S. flag?

The 13 stripes represent the original 13 colonies, and each star stands for a state. The number of stars and the pattern have, therefore, changed whenever states have been added. There have been 50 stars since Alaska and Hawaii joined the union in 1959.

AP/WWP

Why are the U.S. national colors red, white, and blue?

When the Great Seal was approved in 1782, the secretary of the Continental Congress stated that the white signified purity and innocence, the red stood for hardiness and valor, and the blue for vigilance, perseverance, and justice.

How many states are there in the United States?

There are 50 states. The District of Columbia (Washington, DC) is a special federal district created to serve as the capital. Puerto Rico is a commonwealth associated with the United States. Other dependent areas include American Samoa, Guam, Midway Islands, and the Virgin Islands.

What is the official symbol of the United States?

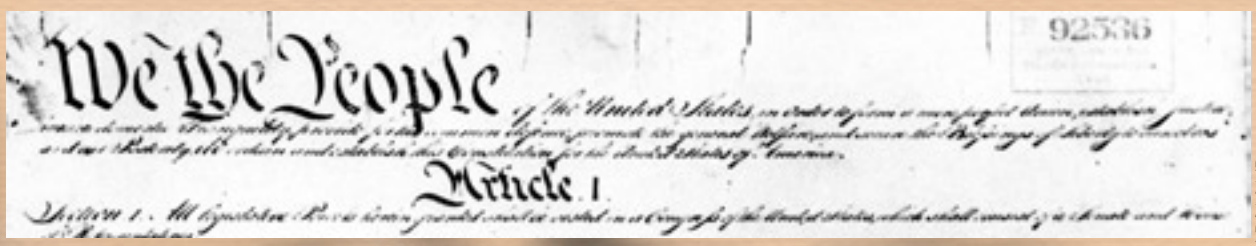
The bald eagle first appeared as an American symbol on a Massachusetts copper cent coined in 1776, but Congress did not choose it as the national emblem until 1789. It was seen as a symbol of strength, courage, freedom, and immortality; and, unlike other eagles, the bald eagle was indigenous only to North America.

AP/WWP

Bald Eagle

What are the opening words of the U.S. Constitution?

"**We the People** of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."



We the People

Article. 1.

AP/WWP

Who was called the "Father of the Constitution"?

James Madison, of Virginia, because he was preeminent in terms of drafting the document and persuasive in his advocacy at the Constitutional Convention.

Who presided over the Constitutional Convention?

George Washington, chosen unanimously.

How long did it take to frame the Constitution?

It was drafted in fewer than 100 working days.

In what order did the states ratify the Constitution?

AP/WWP

Portrait of U.S. President James Madison by artist Gilbert Stuart.

In the following order: Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, and New York. After Washington had been inaugurated, North Carolina and Rhode Island ratified the Constitution.

When did the phrase, "The United States of America," originate?

The first known use of the formal term "United States of America" was in the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Paine, in February, 1776, had written of "Free and independent States of America." The terms "United Colonies," "United Colonies of America," "United Colonies of North America," and also "States," were used in 1775 and 1776.

How many amendments have been added to the U.S. Constitution since its adoption in 1789?

There have been 27 amendments added to the Constitution.

What are the most often quoted words of the Declaration of Independence?

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."

What are the words to the first verse of "The Star-Spangled Banner," the national anthem of the United States ?

Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars thru the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.
Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

AP/WWP

This painting depicts Francis Scott Key seeing the American flag flying over Fort McHenry in Baltimore Harbor the day after he witnessed the British bombardment of the fort in the War of 1812. This sighting inspired the poet to write "The Star-Spangled Banner," which became the official U.S. national anthem in 1931.

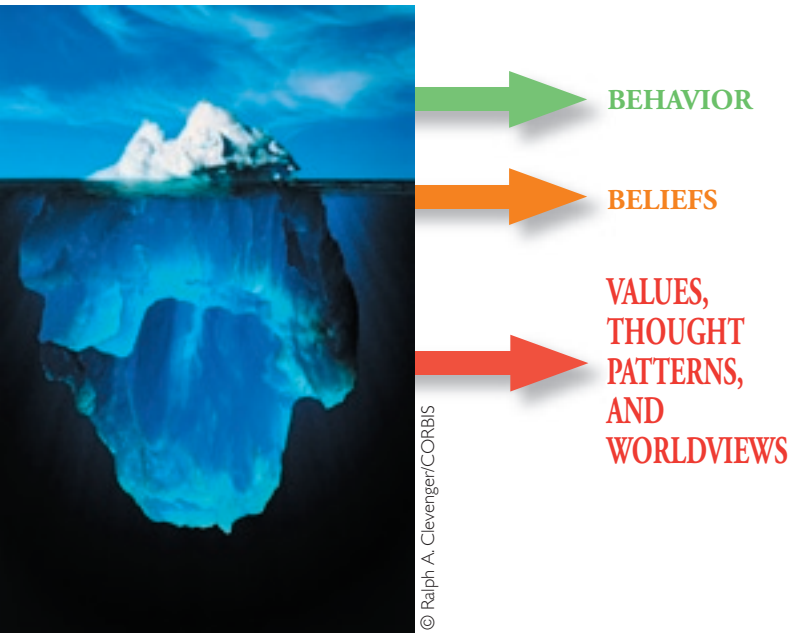
The American Cultural Tapestry

GARY WEAVER

Gary Weaver is a member of the faculty of the School of International Service at American University in the Division of International Communication.

To understand American behavior and public policies, it is essential to know the culture of the United States. In many languages culture usually refers to art, music, history, and literature. In the United States, these would be viewed as the results or artifacts of culture. Our definition of culture is much more anthropological. In American English "culture" simply means the way of life of a group of people passed down from one generation to another through learning. It includes fundamental beliefs, values, thought patterns, and worldviews that are shared by most Americans. We can examine these external aspects of culture and infer that they reflect our internal values, beliefs, and worldviews. Unless we understand American internal culture, it is almost impossible to explain external behavior, including our public policies.

If we had to develop a graphic representation of the American dominant or mainstream culture, we might consider an iceberg. Most of an iceberg is under water and hidden. The same is true of culture. Most of it is internal or inside our heads and well below the water level of conscious awareness. While the visible tip may change—as an iceberg will melt with sun and rain—the base does not change very much over time. In the same way, one's fundamental beliefs, values, ways of thinking, and worldviews change very slowly.



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This part of culture is learned unconsciously simply by growing up in a particular community or family. No parent sits down at the breakfast table with a child and teaches a lesson on "cultural values." Rather they are learned unconsciously just by growing up in a particular family. This is the reason we are relatively unaware of our cultural values until we leave our country and interact with people of other cultures.

Emphasizing Individual Achievement

When immigrants first arrived to America, they brought their European beliefs and values to the "New World." They had landed in a place where there appeared to be unlimited natural resources and vast opportunities to excel. In Europe, if you were born poor you died poor. The combination of European beliefs and values and the abundant supply of resources and opportunities created a new set of cultural values that we call "American."

These new beliefs and values of individual achievement and class mobility were rewarded and reinforced. Americans then began to identify themselves in terms of what they do. If you encounter an American at a party, he or she will often greet you with: "Hello, my name is Gary Weaver. I'm a professor at American University. What do you do?"

People from many other cultures, however, identify themselves in terms of who they are. A West African might greet you by saying, "Hello. I'm Pap Seka the son of Tamsier Seka from up river in Basse." The primary source of his identity is who he is—his father and his birthplace. His status is based upon family and heritage, not what he does as an individual or what he may do in the future.

AP/WWP

Tina Solomon, 88, of Brockton, Massachusetts, lights a candle for the first night of Kwanzaa, an African-American holiday.

Distrust of an Overly Powerful Central Government

In contrast with the practices in Europe, the first settlers to come to the shores of America did not want a king, queen, or pope. They were very suspicious of an overly powerful central government. In the words of the great American philosopher Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), they believed that "less government is better government." Of course, they knew that their "New World" needed a national government to handle foreign affairs and international commerce; matters that impacted everyday life however were deemed the responsibility of local government.

America has never had a national police force. Issues of welfare, law enforcement and adjudication, care for the infirm, and so on, are matters of local jurisdiction. America's civil liberties, such as free speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, and so on, are found in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. These documents protect individual freedoms and defend against an overly powerful national government.

Not Quite a "Melting Pot"

Many people believe that the United States is a mixture of many different cultures without a dominant or mainstream culture. The metaphor often used to reflect this assumption is the "melting pot." People from around the globe bring their cultures here and throw them into the American pot. The mixture is stirred and heated until the various cultures melt together.

There is some truth to this idea. The United States is certainly a culturally diverse society; however, there is also a dominant culture. Immigrants became a part of this culture by giving up many of their differences so that they could fit into the mainstream of society. Some would argue that the United States has often had a cultural "cookie-cutter" approach, with a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, male mold or shape as the model. White immigrant males could easily fit such a mold by adopting an Anglo name, converting to Protestant Christianity, and speaking English without a foreign accent. However, not everyone could fit the cookie-cutter mold. People can't change their gender, skin color, or hair texture. Some people melted more easily than others.

AP/WWP

Arleet Del Real (left), age 5, and Javier Acuna, age 6, dance with the Xochiquetzal-Tiqun Mexican dancers during the "Meet the World" event in Anchorage, Alaska.

Becoming a "Mosaic" or "Tapestry"

Of course, the United States has changed. Most Americans would no longer accept a melting pot or a cookie-cutter culture. In fact, it has become common to describe the United States as a mosaic or a tapestry. These now popular metaphors suggest that it is acceptable to keep one's differences and still be part of the overall society. In a mosaic or a tapestry, each color is distinct and adds to the overall beauty of the object. If you remove one piece from the mosaic or one thread from the tapestry, you destroy it. Today, it is easier to keep your differences. Differences in gender, race, national origin, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation are acceptable and need not be abandoned to have an equal opportunity to achieve your life goals.

"Hyphenated Americans"—people with dual identities—reflect the belief that one can keep one's ethnic, national, religious, or racial identity and still be an American. Mexican-Americans, Irish-Americans, African-Americans or Black Americans, Arab-Americans, Muslim Americans, and American Indians all reflect the practice of being a true American but also maintaining a co-identity. Of course, what holds the country together is not only a set of common values and beliefs, but also the English language and common experiences.

In four states—New Mexico, Texas, California, and Hawaii—and the District of Columbia, non-Hispanic white people are a demographic minority. By 2050, most demographers agree that non-Hispanic white people will be a minority in the overall national population. But, this trend does not seem to threaten the average American. In fact, most Americans believe that diversity enhances creative problem solving and increases productivity.

This reflects a multicultural model and the assumption is that not only are differences welcomed, but they are even valued and viewed as strengths. Very few people would want to go back to the past when minorities had to give up their differences to fit into the mainstream culture. Diversity is an opportunity to be embraced, not an obstacle to be overcome.

The issue facing America today is not how to get rid of differences, but rather how to manage a society with so many differences. The United States has always been very diverse, but it is no longer simply a matter of bringing together different European nationalities and ethnic groups. Today diversity means all races and ethnic groups, various nationalities, men and women, the disabled, employees of all ages, and people of various sexual orientations. Because of the reality of the demographic changes, increasing global interdependence, and the obvious benefits of diversity, Americans will adapt and develop the necessary skills to communicate and work with people of all cultural backgrounds. ■

The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.

Five With Drive

PAUL MALAMUD

Paul Malamud is a staff writer with the Bureau of International Information Programs of the U.S. State Department.

Entrepreneur on the Run

Courtesy of iRUNLIKEAGIRL/Color Classics-Peoria, Illinois.

Jennifer Wright-Tubbs

In any business a successful brand generates sales. But creating the right brand for a new business can also be a statement about your life. That's what entrepreneur Jennifer Wright-Tubbs, of Peoria, Illinois, is learning.

In March of this year, Wright-Tubbs, who has a background in advertising, launched her own running apparel business with the brand name iRUNLIKEAGIRL. The idea of this attention-grabbing logo is that it takes a schoolyard insult—"you run like a girl"—and turns it into a proud statement on the importance of athletics and self-motivation for women. "It's definitely taken a negative and turned it into something more positive," she notes.

"It's about running through one's daily obligations, running through life's celebrations and disappointments, running for health, and running because you can," Wright-Tubbs told her local newspaper, the *Journal Star*. Wright-Tubbs, herself an enthusiastic long-distance runner, says the point of the slogan is to motivate women to run successfully in many areas of their daily round—to live with gusto. "It's a way of life, a sense of who we are," she adds. No stranger to moving quickly, she debuted her line at the More Marathon (for women over 40), and then two weeks later in the famous Boston Marathon. In her first few weeks of business, she toted up tens of thousands in sales. Some of her customers were women reflecting "ageless girl spirit," others were men buying for the women in their lives.

A native of Iowa, Wright-Tubbs took up jogging a mile around a track in college. After she moved to Chicago, she began running longer distances, entering the Chicago Marathon at age 27. Since then, she's competed in eight marathons.

The iRUNLIKEAGIRL Web site invites women everywhere to discover not only what running has done for one woman, but how energy, self-motivation, enthusiasm—and a daring, no-limits attitude—can lead to what Wright-Tubbs likes to call "running with spirit." Her business is just beginning. "The hard thing about this is taking care of it yourself right now," she adds. In the process of relocating in Manhattan, she hopes to expand eventually and to begin moving from a Web operation into retail stores, a prospect that leaves her feeling "cautiously confident." In the future, Wright-Tubbs has big plans to take her brand to more American towns and cities—possibly around the world.

Poor People's Doctor

Paul Farmer was born into poverty—his large family spent part of his boyhood living in a converted bus in a Florida trailer park, as well as in a tent and on a houseboat. Yet he has gone on to become a major force in bringing health care to people around the world.

While a medical student at Harvard in 1987,

AP/WWP

Paul Farmer

Farmer started a Boston-based foundation, Partners in Health (PIH), with fellow student Jim Yong Kim, and established a health clinic in Haiti. This Haitian clinic, which reaches out to about 100,000 people, has become a model for similar clinics that fight disease and also offer a comprehensive range of social and self-improvement services in impoverished areas around the world. Partners in Health describes its goals as "to bring benefits of modern medical care to those most in need of them and to serve as an antidote to despair." The PIH model provides mobile screening units, training programs for health outreach workers, clinics, schools, and in-home delivery of complex drug therapies, as well as research into infectious diseases. Innovative drug dosage protocols developed by Farmer and associates have reduced the mortality rates of drug-resistant tuberculosis and AIDS in places as far-flung as Siberia and Peru.

"A poor people's doctor"—that's how Farmer once described himself to Tracy Kidder, author of the best-selling book about him titled *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. Farmer hopes to go on to reduce famine, disease, and unnecessary mortality around the globe. "I believe we can convince people that it's wrong for the destitute sick of the world to die unattended," says Farmer. "We can change that."

High-Fashion Designer

AP Photo/*Women's Wear Daily*

Chloe Dao

When Thu Thien Dao and Hue Thuc Luong came to the United States from Laos in 1979, they had dreams for their eight daughters. Their family ran a dry-cleaning and tailoring business in Houston, Texas, but like many hard-working immigrants, they wanted their children to get a good education and enter law or medicine.

Their sixth daughter, Chloe, had a different idea, however. By age 10 she had become entranced with a CNN television show called "Style with Elsa Klensch." As a teenager, Chloe began to pursue her passion for beautiful design in her family garage, making jewelry out of screws and washers and other leftover bits. After beginning college as a marketing major, she decided to follow her personal dream by enrolling in a design program at a community college and then paid a visit to New York City's Fashion Institute of Technology.

"I love my mom and dad," as Chloe recently told the *San Jose Mercury News*. "But you have to follow your dreams. You have to live for what you want to do."

The New York trip led to a job in the eveningwear business, as Chloe helped to manage a small design firm and develop it into a multi-million dollar business. In 2000, she returned to Houston to found her own designer boutique, "Lot 8"—so named after the eight family daughters. Lot 8, sporting a collection of gowns, dresses, and sportswear, is now one of Houston's best-known fashion boutiques, and has received national attention.

Chloe also participates in Bravo TV's "Project Runway"—a reality show in which different designers compete each week to solve a design problem. Chloe was the winner of the show's second season, which brought $100,000 to help launch her own clothing line. "I design for everyone," says Chloe. "Good fashion is an equalizer."

Student of Promise

Courtesy of Anna Umanskaya

Anna Umanskaya

Anna Umanskaya is not a typical American teenager. For one thing, at age 18, she lives on her own in an apartment in Brooklyn, one of the boroughs of New York City. For another, she approaches her life with an extraordinary sense of focused energy.

Anna recently won a *New York Times* scholarship for her college education. She shares the distinction with 18 other New York City high school seniors who, out of 1,400 applicants, won the award in 2006 on the basis of merit and scholarly potential. In addition to the $30,000 scholarship, which will enable her to attend Brandeis University, the *Times* also offers the winners a summer internship, a laptop computer, and academic counseling. Anna plans to study international relations in college.

Brought to the United States by her grandmother from Moscow at age 10, Anna had a difficult family life, with relatives living far apart and many moves. Finally,

she struck out on her own. Currently a senior at Franklin Delano Roosevelt High School in Brooklyn, Anna works as a waitress in a coffee shop at night to earn a living. Yet she still ranks near the top of her class, does volunteer work with the elderly, and finds time to write creatively on her own. Last year she was the winner of Brooklyn's annual Holocaust Remembrance Scholarship essay contest for high school students.

So far Anna Umanskaya's life mirrors the traditional immigrant's story in America—tough times, hard work, opportunity arising. "I had to have more," Anna told the *New York Times*. "To make my dreams come true, to get into Brandeis, to be where I want, for a change. "

Counselor to Ex-Convicts

Courtesy of Exodus Transitional Community, Inc.

Julio Medina

For some folks, finding a career requires some very hard work. That has been the story of Julio Medina of Exodus Transnational Community. He came up the hard way.

An arrest in his youth for selling drugs landed Medina a 12-year prison sentence. Yet, the experience—and the counseling he received in the New York State prison system by the religiously based Exodus Group—revealed to him that serving his fellow man can be a higher calling. Released in 1996, he began work as a counselor with substance abusers and the HIV-affected.

Eventually, Medina decided to devote himself to the problems of ex-prisoners trying to return to society. Based on his own life experience, Medina was well aware of how many released convicts revert to crime, and some of the reasons: difficulty getting jobs, emotional agonies, inability to form family bonds. In 1999, he obtained funds to form Exodus Transnational Community, a place where ex-convicts who are having problems re-integrating into society can find practical assistance.

Today, Exodus Transnational, headquartered in East Harlem, New York, has helped over 1,500 men and women returning into the larger world from prison, addiction, or homelessness. Exodus offers a program of self-assessment, counseling, and housing and employment referrals—even computer training. Exodus—part of a U.S. Department of Labor initiative—claims it has reduced its clients' prison recidivism rate to the point where 75 percent return to normal lives. (Nationwide, about two-thirds of convicts wind up back in prison.)

Medina believes that the best people to help ex-prisoners are ex-prisoners themselves. "I think no one can do this better than men and women who've gone through the process," he once told a newspaper. "We are the experts at doing these things. We are the ones who are going to turn this around." ■

U.S.A. QuickFacts

Statistical Abstract of the United States
http://www.census.gov/statab/

Geography

Total Area (square kilometers)	9,631,418
Persons per Square Kilometer (2006)	32.56

Economy

Gross Domestic Product (2005)	$11,134,600,000,000
Median Household Income (2004)	$44,389
Per Capita Money Income (2003)	$23,276
GDP Growth Rate (2005)	3.5%
Unemployment Rate (February 2006)	4.8%
Annual Unemployment Rate (2005)	5.1%
Private Non-Farm Employment (2005)	139,532,000
Retail Sales (2003)	$3,275,407,000,000
Retail Sales per Capita (2003)	$11,254
Minority-Owned Firms (2002)	17.9%
Women-Owned Firms (1997)	30.0%

Education

Literacy Rate (UNESCO Human Development Report)	99%
Number of Colleges and Universities (*Digest of Education Statistics*)	4,168
Number of Primary Schools*	61,572
Number of Secondary Schools*	26,541
Cost of University Education (Estimates from *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2003-04)	$9,246 per year at public institutions $24,748 at private institutions

* *Characteristics of Schools, Districts … 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey*, NCES Online

AMERICAN ICONS

The word "icon" has religious roots. It originally referred to a picture of a sacred person, such as images of Christ in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. But the meaning has broadened to encompass any powerful symbol—for example, *Newsweek* magazine a few years ago published a list of the top "200 Pop Culture Icons."

We present the 32 American icons on these pages in the spirit of that *Newsweek* list. Some, like Elvis Presley or Marilyn Monroe, are worldwide emblems of America's popular culture. Others have been this country's great political or civil rights leaders, scientists, entrepreneurs, writers, and athletes. What our icons have in common is that they have all achieved a level of fame among their fellow Americans that merits the adjective "iconic." That is, their lives symbolize for many people something large and important about this country and the values that Americans live by.

When you look closely at these figures, patterns emerge. One is the familiar tale of immigration and steadily broadening diversity. Since we have arranged this section in chronological order, male figures of English descent, the generation of the Founding Fathers, preside over the first years of our list. Over time, women, Native Americans, and African Americans begin to play a prominent role in the saga that is America. Then, gradually, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and other ethnic groups assume their place in American society.

As we discussed which names to include on this list, we realized that any effort to compile American icons is likely to leave out as many important figures as it can include. In short, we could have filled books with icons from American history, but space limits us to these 32.

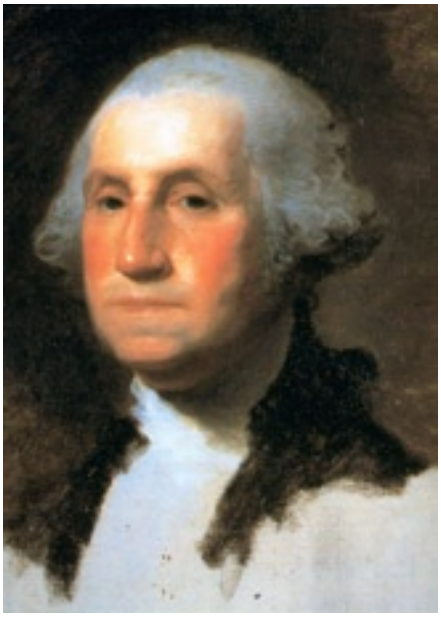
We wonder whether you would like to suggest any American icons—advice to us for the next time we create such a list. If so, we'd like to hear from you at iiptcp@state.gov. Just give us the name and tell us why, in a sentence or two, you think this person is an American icon.

(All images © AP/WWP)

AMERICAN ICONS

Benjamin Franklin (1706-90) Franklin is the Founding Father who is seen as the master of home-spun practical wisdom. Of humble origins, Franklin began as a printer and writer (the author of *Poor Richard's Almanack*), then became an inventor and scientist, and concluded his long career as the consummate diplomat. He played a key behind-the-scenes role at the conventions that led to the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

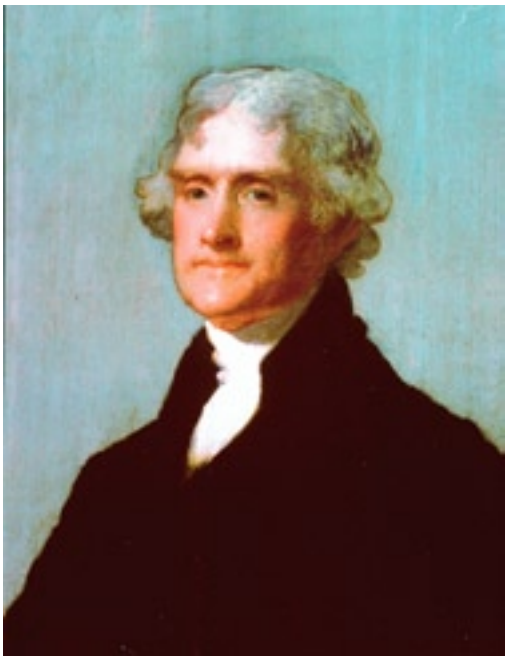
Library of Congress



AP/WWP

George Washington (1732-99) The first president of the United States and the American commander in chief during the War of Independence from Great Britain, Washington is often called the "Father of His Country." Originally a gentleman farmer from Virginia, Washington showed great leadership qualities as a soldier. Highly popular with the American public, he was eulogized by a member of Congress as "first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) Jefferson was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. "We hold these truths to be self-evident," he wrote, "that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." Jefferson, who was later elected the third president of the United States, also wrote the state of Virginia's law establishing religious freedom and founded the University of Virginia.

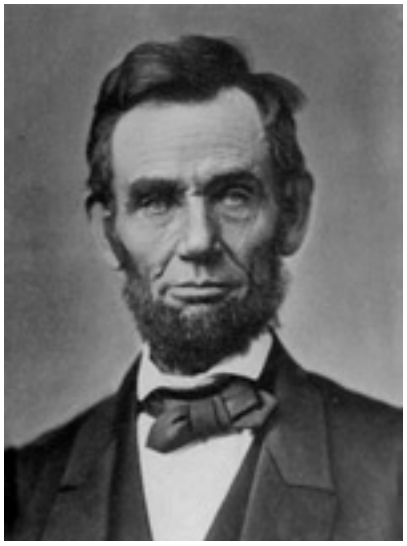


AP/WWP

AMERICAN ICONS

AP/WWP

Sacagawea (ca. 1786-1812) A young woman of the Lemhi Indians in present-day Idaho, Sacagawea helped the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804-06 explore vast newly acquired lands in the American West. Sacagawea, who spoke several Indian dialects, served as a guide and interpreter to various Native American tribes during this peaceful expedition. When the expedition encountered the Lemhi band, she arranged for the Lemhi to provide the horses, provisions, and shelter that made the journey to the Pacific Ocean possible. One of Sacagawea's descendants, Willow Jack, is pictured in authentic costume.


AP/WWP

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) President during the American Civil War, 1861-65, Lincoln is revered for having kept the Union together and freeing the slaves. A legislator from Illinois, Lincoln won the Republican nomination for president and was elected on an anti-slavery platform in 1860. As a result, 11 southern states seceded and war began. In the Gettysburg Address, he stated his resolve "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Library of Congress

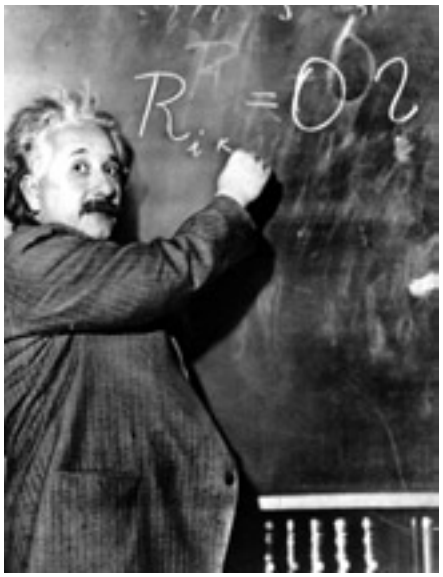
Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) Appalled that the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1870) guaranteed the right to vote to newly freed slaves but not to women, Susan B. Anthony led a group of women to the polls in Rochester, New York. She was arrested several times for trying to vote, and later organized the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. She died in 1906, having paved the way for the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which granted American women the right to vote in 1920.

AP/WWP

Sitting Bull (ca. 1831-1890) Last of the great Native American chiefs, Sitting Bull was a Sioux tribe leader known for his determined, but doomed, attempt to maintain Indian lands on the Great Plains. The Indians depended on large herds of buffalo, which were being destroyed by the influx of hunters, soldiers, and settlers from the eastern United States in the mid-1800s. In 1876, Sitting Bull led the Indian forces at the famous battle of Little Bighorn against U.S. Army soldiers commanded by General George Custer.

AMERICAN ICONS

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) The foremost physicist of the 20th century, Albert Einstein developed the theory of relativity, which overturned previous ideas on the nature of the physical universe. Born in 1879 in Germany, he developed his important ideas as a young man. Expelled from Germany by the Nazis in 1933, Einstein then took a position with the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, New Jersey. His ideas would prove instrumental in developing the atomic bomb during World War II.



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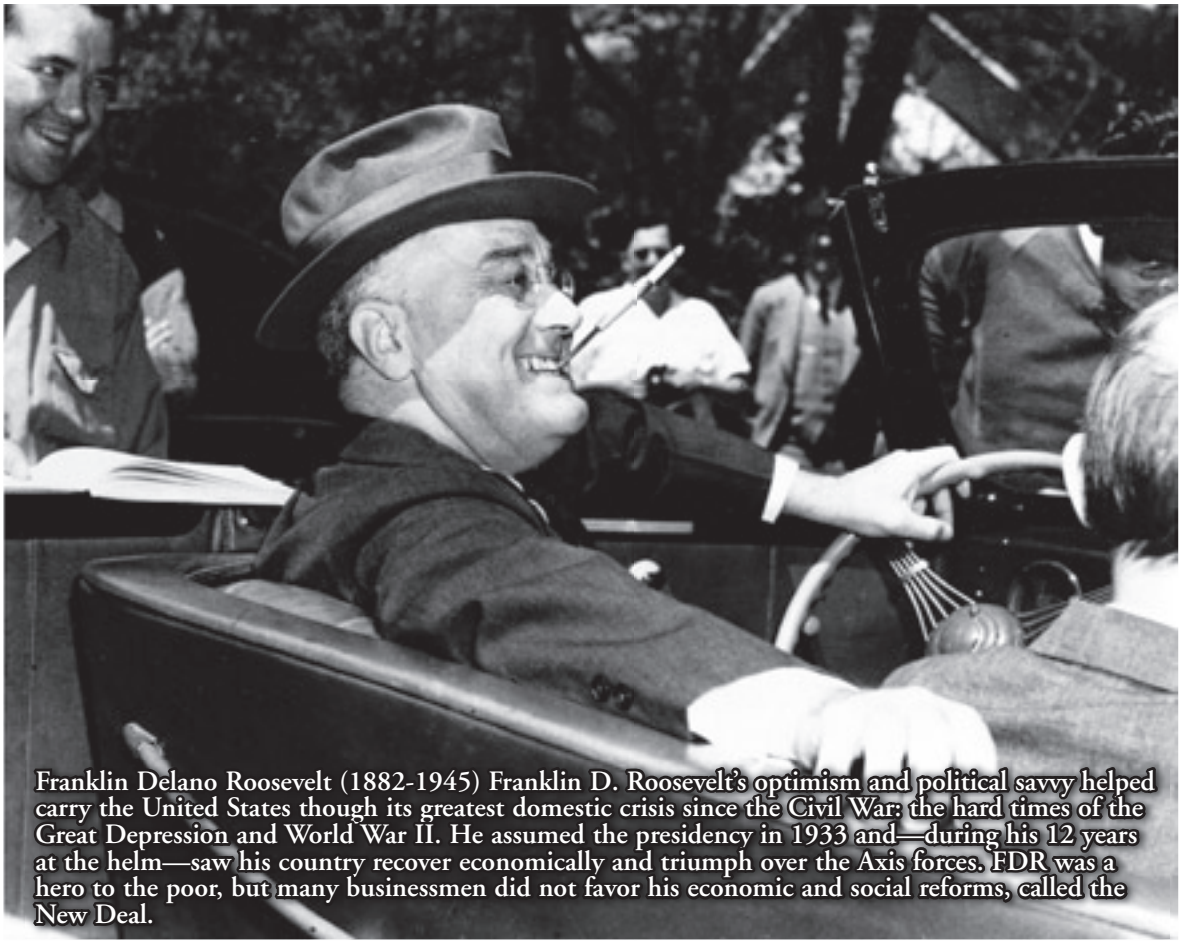


Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945) Franklin D. Roosevelt's optimism and political savvy helped carry the United States though its greatest domestic crisis since the Civil War: the hard times of the Great Depression and World War II. He assumed the presidency in 1933 and—during his 12 years at the helm—saw his country recover economically and triumph over the Axis forces. FDR was a hero to the poor, but many businessmen did not favor his economic and social reforms, called the New Deal.

AP/WWP

AMERICAN ICONS

Khalil Gibran (1883-1931) Born in Lebanon, poet Khalil Gibran immigrated to America at the age of 12. The masterpiece of this most influential Arab-American writer, *The Prophet*, has been a best-seller for over 50 years. It is often cited as the second most purchased book in the United States, after the *Bible*. The U.S. Congress established the Khalil Gibran Memorial Poetry Garden in Washington, DC, in 1990. "God made Truth with many doors to welcome every believer who knocks on them," Gibran once wrote.

Library of Congress

AP/WWP

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) Eleanor Roosevelt was the niece of one president, Theodore Roosevelt, and the wife of another, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. As First Lady from 1933 until 1945, she campaigned for her husband's New Deal and for civil rights. She was the first woman to speak in front of a national political convention, write a syndicated column, and hold regular press conferences. She helped found the United Nations, and chaired the committee that drafted and approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

AP/WWP

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) "The hardest thing in the world to do," novelist Ernest Hemingway once wrote, "is to write straight honest prose on human beings." An ambulance driver in World War I, Hemingway lived in Europe in the 1920s and published his first popular novels, *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, about his generation's war experiences. His long career as a novelist and writer of short stories brought him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.

AP/WWP

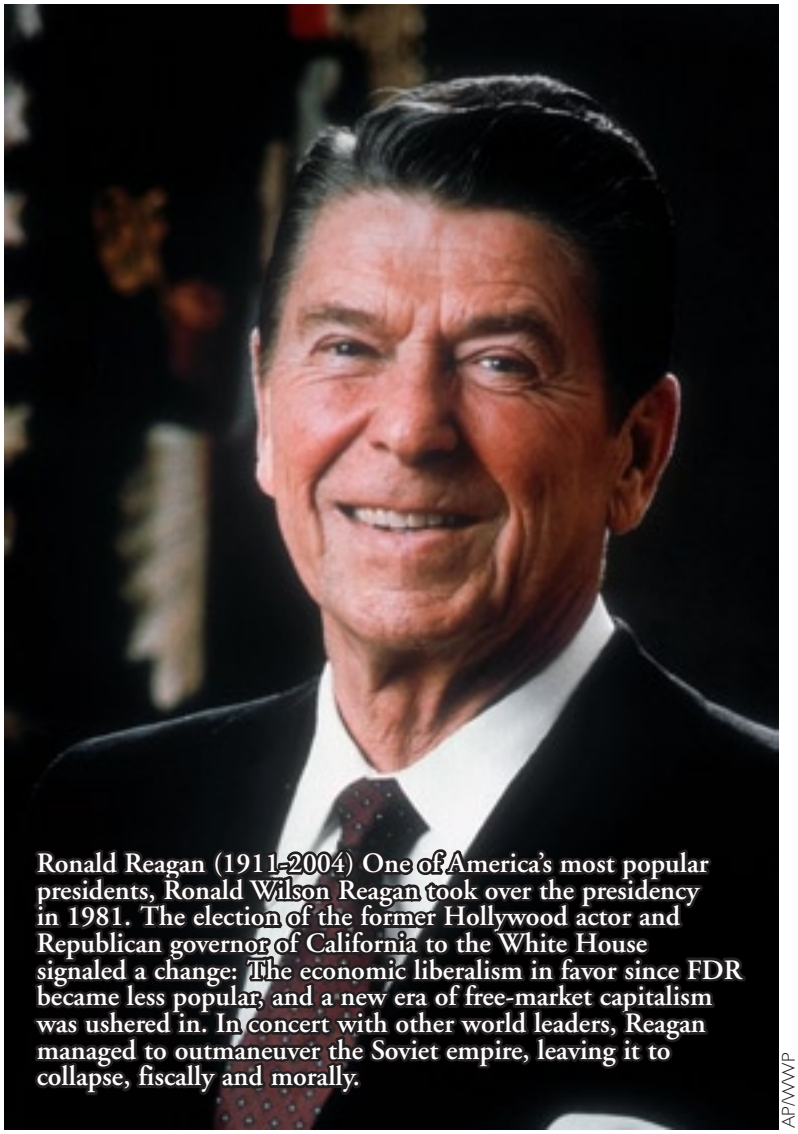
Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong (1901-1971) The most famous jazz musician of the 20th century, Armstrong transformed a regional musical tradition into an American art form with his virtuoso trumpet playing and distinctive singing. He single-handedly made the trumpet an indispensable solo instrument for jazz. He also is credited with inventing "scat singing," wordless vocalizing that became a key element for many jazz performers. "What a Wonderful World," "Hello, Dolly," "When the Saints Go Marching In," and "Stardust" are just a handful of his memorable songs.

AMERICAN ICONS

AP/WWP

John Wayne (1907-79) John Wayne was the most popular of a long line of Hollywood movie cowboys who perpetuated the cowboy myth, created in the 19th century by Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Wayne was discovered by director John Ford while working as a prop assistant, and rose to stardom in the 1939 Western movie *Stagecoach*. Thereafter Wayne specialized in laconic, macho roles, often in elegiac Westerns directed by Ford or Howard Hawks, as well as World War II movies.

AP/WWP



Ronald Reagan (1911-2004) One of America's most popular presidents, Ronald Wilson Reagan took over the presidency in 1981. The election of the former Hollywood actor and Republican governor of California to the White House signaled a change: The economic liberalism in favor since FDR became less popular, and a new era of free-market capitalism was ushered in. In concert with other world leaders, Reagan managed to outmaneuver the Soviet empire, leaving it to collapse, fiscally and morally.

AP/WWP

John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917-1963) People everywhere look back nostalgically to JFK's three years as president of the United States because of his leadership, his accomplishments, and his grace, wit, and charisma. He inspired millions before he was killed by an assassin's bullet in Dallas, Texas. Although not afraid to stand up to the Soviet missile threat in Cuba in 1962, he worked with the Soviet Union to slow down the nuclear arms race. His legacy includes the Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps.

AMERICAN ICONS

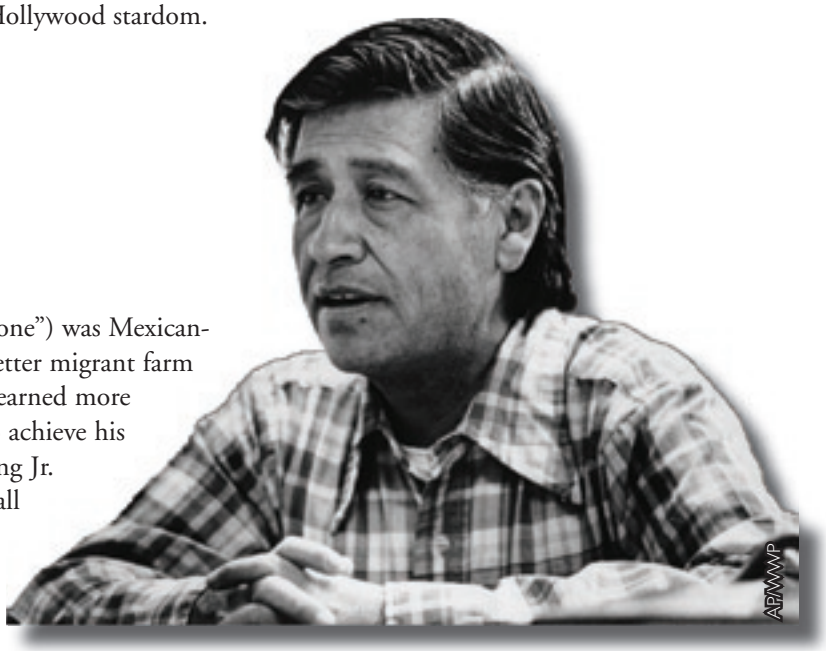
Jackie Robinson (1919-72) Born in Georgia to a family of sharecroppers, Jack Roosevelt Robinson was the first African American to play major league baseball, integrating professional sports in the United States. His achievement was recognized by the retirement of his uniform number, 42, by major league baseball teams; the number will never again be assigned to another player. In 1949, he was selected the National League's Most Valuable Player of the Year. In 1962, he was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

AP/WWP

AP/WWP

Marilyn Monroe (1926-1962) More than 40 years after her death, Marilyn Monroe remains the personification of Hollywood glamour. She achieved her iconic status, however, not just with her captivating beauty and voluptuous curves. She proved her talent as an actress in 1950s comedies such as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Some Like It Hot*. In the popular mind, even her personal problems, including three failed marriages, suggest the poignant tragedy that is often the other side of Hollywood stardom.

César Chávez (1927-1993) "Sí se puede" ("It can be done") was Mexican-American labor activist Chávez's motto in his fight to better migrant farm workers' terrible conditions. A humble man who never earned more than $6,000 a year, Chávez used nonviolent methods to achieve his goals, just like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. His fasts, boycotts, and strikes persuaded Americans of all kinds to support his United Farm Workers of America union and social justice for the poor.


AP/WWP

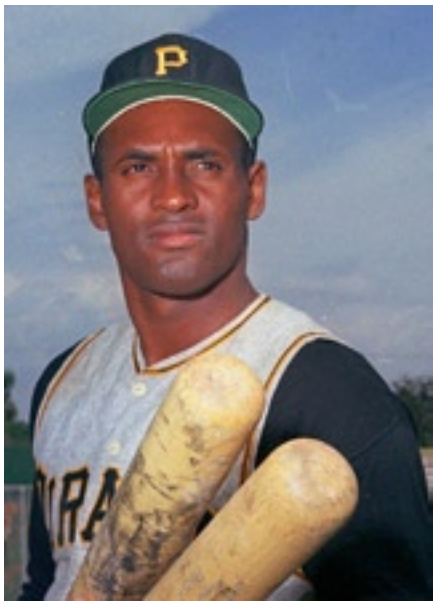
AMERICAN ICONS

AP/WWP

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) King was the dominant force in the American civil rights movement (1957-1968). The son of a pastor and a schoolteacher, he was the nonviolent leader behind the Montgomery bus boycott, and always will be revered for—among many other achievements—his "I have a dream" speech at the March on Washington in 1963. He remains the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate. He was felled by an assassin's bullet, but his legacy—the guarantee that "all men are created equal"—endures.

AP/WWP

Toni Morrison (1931-) Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Ohio, and has had an illustrious career as a writer, editor, and teacher. She has won numerous awards for her writing, among them the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for her novel *Beloved*, and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1994. Her novels give voice to richly expressive depictions of black America, and she has actively used her influence to encourage the publication of other black writers.



AP/WWP

Roberto Clemente (1934-1972) Fans throughout the Americas affectionately remember Puerto Rican-born Clemente for his baseball feats and his humanitarian work. His greatest feat was leading the Pittsburgh Pirates to a seven-game World Series victory over the Baltimore Orioles in 1971, when he was selected the series' "Most Valuable Player." After his tragic death in a plane crash while flying relief supplies to Nicaraguan earthquake victims, Clemente became the first Hispanic American elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

AMERICAN ICONS

Elvis Presley (1935-1977) A singing phenomenon from the 1950s until his death, Presley made rock-and-roll music popular. He is one of the best-selling recording artists in history. Characterized by a "duck tail" hairdo and a passionate, distinctive singing style, Presley led a troubled, drug-filled life. President Jimmy Carter paid tribute after his death by saying, "His music and his personality, fusing the styles of white country and black rhythm and blues, permanently changed the face of American popular culture."

AP/WWP

Superman (1938-) "It's a bird, it's a plane, it's Superman!" The greatest comic book superhero, conceived by Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel, made his first appearance in 1938 in *Action Comics #1*. His exploits have entertained millions worldwide on radio, TV, movies, and video games. Everyone is familiar with the story of the Man of Steel and his alter ego, Clark Kent. Superman's powers are dependably at the service of "truth, justice, and the American way" against the forces of evil.

AP/WWP

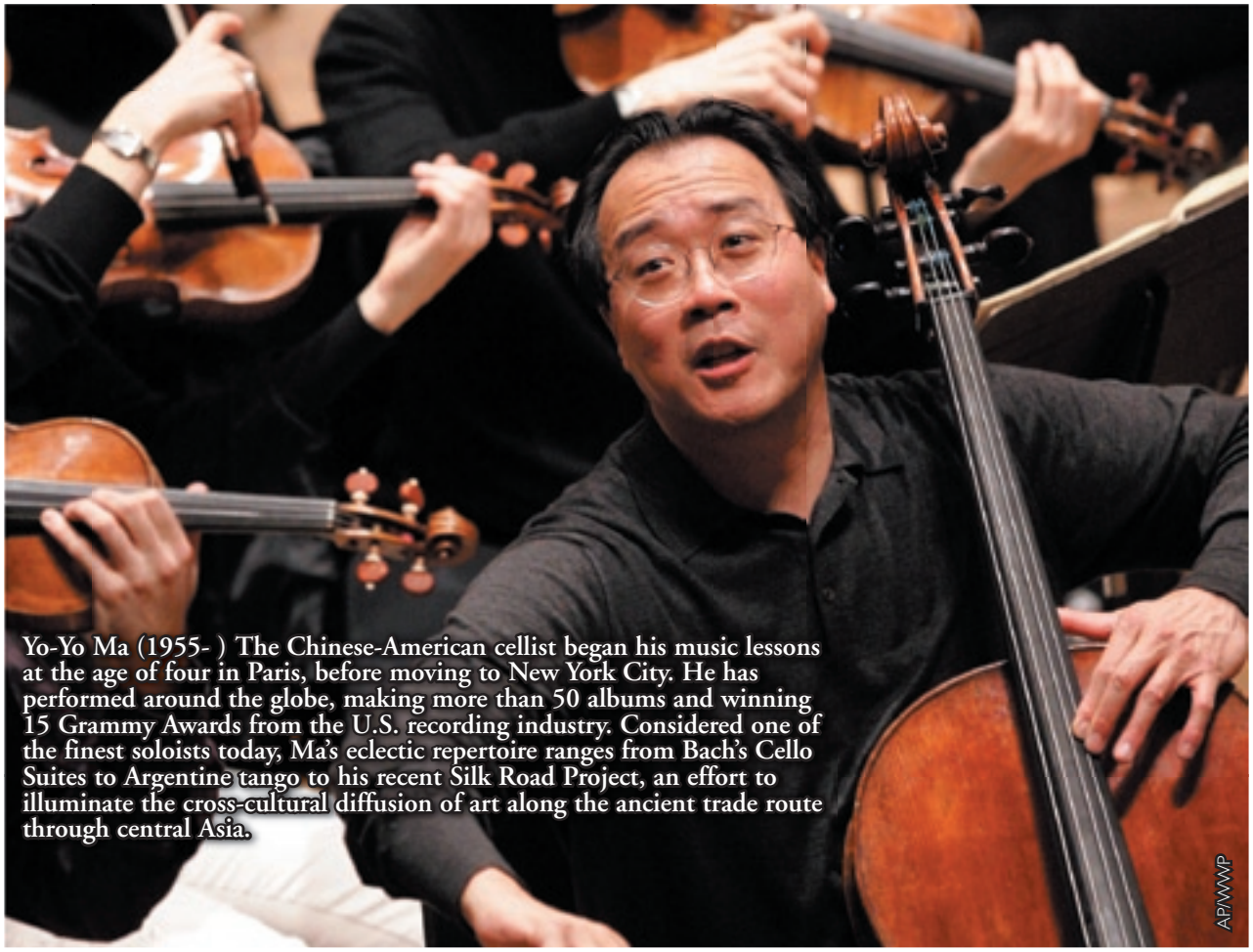
AP/WWP

Muhammad Ali (1942-) Ali defeated Sonny Liston in 1964 to become heavyweight boxing champion of the world. By the time he retired as a boxer in 1981, the speed of his dancing footwork had revolutionized the sport. But Ali is better known to the world as an outspoken figure of political convictions. While champion, he converted to Islam. In 1967, at the height of the Vietnam War, he refused induction into the U.S. Army and was prosecuted and stripped of his title. Eventually, the Supreme Court ruled that he had a right on religious grounds to refuse the draft.

AMERICAN ICONS

Oprah Winfrey (1954-) Raised on a Mississippi farm with no indoor plumbing, Oprah Winfrey has become arguably the most influential person on American television and one of the richest women in the world. At 19, she was Nashville, Tennessee's first female and first black television news anchor. In 1988, her talk show in Chicago went on to national television and her popularity has skyrocketed since then around the world. She is also a successful producer and magazine publisher.

AP/WWP



Yo-Yo Ma (1955-) The Chinese-American cellist began his music lessons at the age of four in Paris, before moving to New York City. He has performed around the globe, making more than 50 albums and winning 15 Grammy Awards from the U.S. recording industry. Considered one of the finest soloists today, Ma's eclectic repertoire ranges from Bach's Cello Suites to Argentine tango to his recent Silk Road Project, an effort to illuminate the cross-cultural diffusion of art along the ancient trade route through central Asia.

AP/WWP

AMERICAN ICONS

AP/WWP

Mickey Mouse (1928-) One of America's most recognizable movie stars, Mickey Mouse made his screen debut in the first sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*. The cartoonist Walt Disney had conceived Mickey, the mouse that laid the foundation for an entertainment empire, on a cross-country train. Mickey's antics quickly proved popular all over the world in hundreds of cartoons and the animated feature film *Fantasia*. The irascible Donald Duck and the bumbling Goofy came later, but Mickey was the first in a long line from Disney.

Tiger Woods (1975-) Eldrick (Tiger) Woods, widely acknowledged as the greatest professional golfer in recent years, is the son of a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army, and his wife, a native of Thailand. He was nicknamed "Tiger" as a child after a Vietnamese soldier and friend of his late father. Woods played in his first professional tournament at 16. With his second Masters tournament victory in 2001, he became the first golfer ever to hold all four professional major championships at the same time.

Steven Jobs (1955-) The chief executive of Apple Computers and Pixar Animation Studios grew up in California and attended college only briefly. With his friend, Steve Wozniak, he founded Apple Computers in 1976. In 1986 Jobs left the company and struck out on his own, but Apple bought his new company in 1996. With the success of Apple's iPod portable music player, and smash movie hits from Pixar Studios like *Toy Story*, his place in history as an innovative businessman is certain.

Wynton Marsalis (1961-) The most famous jazz musician of his generation, trumpeter Wynton Marsalis grew up in New Orleans. He moved to New York City to attend the Juilliard School of Music in 1978 and began playing gigs in the city. Next, he toured with drummer Art Blakey's seminal small group. Now, as director of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, Marsalis travels the world playing and composing. "Marsalis," writes critic Stanley Crouch, "truly loves to communicate the essences of music to his fellow musicians and his audiences."

AP/WWP

AP/WWP

Michelle Kwan (1980-) Perhaps no other figure skater is better known than five-time World Figure Skating Champion and nine-time U.S. national champion Michelle Kwan. The California native (her parents are Chinese by birth) has been skating since age five. Kwan's daring leaps and flowing artistry in short and long programs have won devoted fans. However, one title continues to elude her, the Olympic gold medal. Although she holds bronze and silver medals, injuries forced her to withdraw from the 2006 Olympic Winter Games.

MILESTONES OF U.S. HISTORY

1565 St. Augustine (Florida) founded – the nation's oldest city

"Pilgrims Going to Church," an 1867 painting by George Broughton, gives a glimpse into the life of the earliest English settlers. AP/WWP, National Gallery of American Art

1607 Jamestown (Virginia) settled

1620 Pilgrims land in Massachusetts (Mayflower Compact)

1775-83 War of Independence

George Washington's soldiers raise the 13-star American flag. © North Wind / North Wind Picture Archives

Declaration of Independence **1776**

The Articles of Confederation **1777**

Constitution **1788**

This 1856 painting by Junius Brutus Stearns, "George Washington Addressing the Constitutional Convention," depicts a climactic moment near the end of the convention. AP/WWP

1803 Louisiana Purchase

The Louisiana Purchase effectively doubled the size of the United States in 1803. © North Wind/ North Wind Picture Archives

1812-14 War of 1812

The Monroe Doctrine **1823**

Seeking support for the ratification of the 19th Amendment, officers of the National Women's Party hold a banner with a quote from Susan B. Anthony. AP/WWP

1846-48 Mexican War

1846 Acquisition of the "Oregon Country" to the 49th parallel by treaty with Britain

1861-65 Civil War

1863 Emancipation Proclamation

1865-77 Reconstruction

1898 Spanish-American War

1917-18 World War I

1919 Women's Suffrage

MILESTONES OF U.S. HISTORY

1929-40 The Great Depression

American soldiers land on the Normandy coast on D-Day, June 6, 1944. AP/WWP, U.S. Army

1941-45 World War II

1947 Cold War begins; the Truman Doctrine

1948 The Marshall Plan

1950-53 Korean War

Brown vs. Board of Education **1954**

Black and white high school students study together in Clinton, Tennessee, in 1964. AP/WWP

Cuban Missile Crisis **1962**

March on Washington **1963**

Dr. Martin Luther King (third from left) during the March on Washington on August 28, 1963. AP/WWP

1965-73 Vietnam War

U.S. soldiers in Vietnam in 1965. AP/WWP

1969 First man on the moon

Astronaut Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon, took this photo of fellow astronaut Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin during their moon walk on July 20, 1969. AP/WWP, NASA

1989 End of the Cold War

U.S. President Ronald Reagan and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl (right) at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin, Germany, on June 12, 1987. AP/WWP

2001 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States

A Brief Tour of the United States

Although many aspects of American life are similar throughout the 50 states, looking at regional differences can shed light on some of the complexities of our vast country. Richard Huckaby, a foreign service officer who coordinates the State Department's electronic journals, presents one view of what the regions are and how they differ. This article is drawn from presentations Huckaby has made to audiences in France, South Korea, and Kosovo.

There are those who believe that it is no longer appropriate to talk about regional differences in the United States—that all Americans have been melded into one "monolithic" culture characterized by one way of thinking, one way of eating, one way of speaking. It is certainly true that there are few places in the United States where you cannot eat at McDonald's, Burger King, or Pizza Hut. Almost anywhere you live you can shop at Wal-Mart, The Gap, or Foot Locker at malls that differ very little from one another. Almost everyone has access to the same television shows and movies, and many can listen to the same mass-market music. But does this mean that regional differences are more myth than reality? I don't think so.

Persistent Local Cultures

Courtesy of Blenheim Bottlers

Blenheim Ginger Ale is sold in four types—Old #3 HOT, #5 NOT AS HOT, #9 DIET, AND #11 GINGER BEER—*http://theacf.com/blenheim/*.

First, let's talk about food. It is true that much food is standard throughout the country—a person can buy the same brands of frozen pizza everywhere in the United States. Cereals, candy bars, and many other items come in identical packages from Alaska to Florida. Generally, the variety and quality of fresh fruits and vegetables vary little from one state to the next. On the other hand, it would be unusual to be served hush puppies (a kind of fried corn bread) or grits (ground and boiled corn prepared in a variety of ways) in Massachusetts or Illinois, but normal to get them in Georgia or other parts of the South. While Coke, Pepsi, and Seven-Up are available everywhere, it is impossible to find Blenheim Ginger Ale outside of South Carolina. Chicago pizza (very deep dish, thick crust) is quite different from New York pizza. I've eaten deep-fried crocodile meat in New Orleans, but never seen it anywhere else in the country. People everywhere eat Mexican-style food at Taco Bell, but Tex-Mex food in Texas is very different from other types of so-called Mexican food. And many areas have their own special hot dog.

I grew up in the foothills of western South Carolina. Every meal at home included some form of potatoes and bread. When I graduated from university, I first worked in the South Carolina Low Country, the area near the coast. I was quite surprised that nearly every meal included rice in some form. I also learned that rice was cooked in a completely different manner—steamed instead of simply boiled. When I later moved to the Pee Dee region in northeastern South Carolina, I first heard of chicken bog, a dish in which small pieces of chicken and coarsely ground black pepper are cooked in rice. So you see, there are definitely still regional differences in food—not just between regions, but even within one small state.

Another difference is language. While American English is generally standard, American speech often differs according to what part of the country you are in. Southerners tend to speak more slowly, in what is referred to as a

Courtesy of UNO Chicago Grill

Traditional "Chicago pizza" is deep-dish with hearty fillings. .

"Southern drawl." Midwesterners use "flat" a's, and the New York City patois features a number of Yiddish words contributed by the city's large Jewish population—words such as "schlepp" (to drag or haul) or "nosh" (snack). Natives of Boston or the Bronx are quickly identifiable by their marked accent, and you probably know about "Valley talk," a form of teenage slang, from southern California. Immigrant influence is also evident in place names and certain words used in regions with heavy concentrations of a particular ethnic group. Examples include Lafayette County, Wisconsin; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Wounded Knee, South Dakota; and Santa Cruz, California.

Vocabulary also differs from region to region. Once when I was in graduate school, I mentioned that one of the "eyes" on my stove wasn't working properly, and my colleagues from other parts of the country had no idea that I was talking about what they call a burner. The language of the West includes numerous words of Spanish origin (many of which have spread across the country), and there are parts of the Midwest and Pennsylvania where many German words are still used. If you've seen the 1985 movie *Witness*, you've seen an example of this.

Regional differences also make themselves known in less tangible ways, such as attitudes and outlooks. An example is the attention paid to foreign events in newspapers. In the East, where people look out across the Atlantic Ocean, some papers tend to show the greatest concern with what is happening in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. On the West Coast, the focus is often on events in East Asia and Australia.

Americans share many characteristics, including belief in the importance of privacy, individualism, and personal independence. But many Americans also think of themselves as having certain characteristics linked to their region, such as New England self-reliance, Southern hospitality, Midwestern wholesomeness, and Western mellowness.

The following sections present some of the geographic characteristics and historical influences, such as settlement patterns, that have contributed to these regional differences.

Before focusing on the regions of the United States, though, it is important to have a grasp of some features of the country as a whole. The United States is the third largest country in land area, behind Russia and Canada. In population, it is also the third largest—this time behind China and India. To give you an idea of how large the country is, it takes approximately five days to drive across the continental Unites States. And that's not counting Hawaii or the largest state, Alaska.

AP/WWP

A plateful of thick fideo con pollo includes servings of rice, refried pinto beans, lettuce, tomato, and onions. This is a typical Tex-Mex meal.

The Regions

There are many possible ways to divide the country into regions. In this commentary, we use a basic and traditional grouping: New England, the Mid-Atlantic States, the South, the Midwest, and the West. Please remember that these are not official designations. They are far from absolute, and characteristics often blend from one region into the next, as shown in the accompanying map. The lists of such things as cities and literary figures are not by any means exhaustive, but are intended simply to provide an introduction. The list of Internet resources at the end of the journal can provide access to more detailed information.

New England

Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island

Major Cities: Boston, Massachusetts; Hartford, Connecticut; Providence, Rhode Island

Literature: Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sylvia Plath, Robert Frost, Richard Russo, Russell Banks

AP/WWP

Maple leaves have begun to change to their fall hues by the Old Meeting House in East Montpelier, Vermont.

Although the smallest region geographically and one not blessed with large expanses of rich farmland or a mild climate, New England played a dominant role in American development. From the 17th century until well into the 19th, New England was the country's cultural and economic center.

The earliest European settlers of New England were conservative English Protestants, many of whom came in search of religious freedom. They gave the region its distinctive political format—the town meeting (an outgrowth of meetings held by church elders) in which citizens gathered to discuss the issues of the day. Even though only men who owned property could vote, town meetings afforded New Englanders an unusually high level of participation in government. Such meetings still function in many New England communities today, although of course they now include women.

New Englanders found it difficult to farm the land in large lots, as was common in the South. By 1750, therefore, many settlers had turned to other pursuits. The mainstays of the region became shipbuilding, fishing, and trade. In their business dealings, New Englanders gained a reputation for hard work, shrewdness, thrift, and ingenuity. These traits were useful as the Industrial Revolution reached America in the first half of the 19th century. In Massachusetts,

AP/WWP

Students walk across the green at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. Dartmouth, founded in 1769, is a private, liberal arts college and member of the prestigious Ivy League.

schools include Harvard, Yale, Brown, Dartmouth, Wellesley, Smith, Mt. Holyoke, Williams, Amherst, and Wesleyan, to name but a few.

An important historical literary work from this region is Thoreau's *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*. New England was also home to poets Emily Dickinson and later Robert Frost, as well as to Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is credited with having given impetus to the abolitionist movement.

Connecticut, and Rhode Island, for example, new factories sprang up to manufacture goods such as clothing, rifles, and clocks. Most of the money to run these businesses came from Boston, which was the financial heart of the nation.

In recent times, this populous region has lost many of its industries to states or foreign countries where goods can be made more cheaply. The region's economy has, however, rebounded with the growth of the microelectronics, computer, and biotech industries. Education, high technology, financial services, tourism, and medicine continue to drive the regional economy.

New England has always supported a vibrant cultural life, with institutions like the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Museum of Fine Arts. Education is another of the region's strongest legacies. Its cluster of top-ranking universities and colleges is unequaled by any other region. These top

AP/WWP

The Block Island north lighthouse is located in New Shoreham, Rhode Island. The area has become a tourist haven visited by tens of thousands each year.

AP/WWP

The Boott Mills in Lowell, Massachusetts, generated some 99,500 kilometers of fabric per year during its industrial heyday. It now serves as a museum.

AP/WWP

Store owner Peter Walsh holds up a lobster he has just caught from this tank in Scarborough, Maine. Maine lobsters are world-renowned.

As some of the original New England settlers migrated westward, immigrants from Canada, Ireland, Italy, and Eastern Europe moved into the region. Despite a changing population, much of the original spirit of New England remains. This can be seen in the simple wood frame houses and white church steeples that are features of many small towns, and in the traditional lighthouses that dot the Atlantic coast.

New England is famous for foods like clam chowder, Maine lobsters, Vermont maple syrup, turkey, Boston baked beans, and Boston cream pie.

The Mid-Atlantic

New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland

Major Cities: New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Baltimore, Maryland

Literature: Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Gertrude Stein, J.D. Salinger, Bernard Malamud, Anne Tyler, August Wilson

AP/WWP

The two-masted sailing ship Niagara from Erie, Pennsylvania, passes by the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor.

If New England provided the brains and the dollars for 19th-century American expansion, the Mid-Atlantic States provided the muscle. The region's largest states, New York and Pennsylvania, became centers of heavy industry producing iron, glass, and steel.

The Mid-Atlantic region was settled by a wider range of people than New England. Dutch immigrants moved into the lower Hudson River Valley in what is now New York State. Swedes went to Delaware. English Catholics founded Maryland, and an English Protestant sect, the Friends (Quakers), settled Pennsylvania. In time, all these settlements fell under English control, but the region continued to be a magnet for people of diverse nationalities, including a large German community.

Early settlers were mostly farmers and traders, and the region served as a bridge between North and South. Philadelphia, midway between New England and the southern colonies, was home to the Continental Congress, the convention of delegates from the original colonies that organized the American Revolution. The same city was the

Traffic moves through New York City's Times Square, one of the world's most famous intersections.

AP/WWP

Waterman Joe Stone sifts through oysters on his boat while dredging on the Patuxent River in Solomons, Maryland.

AP/WWP

birthplace of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the U.S. Constitution in 1787. New York City and Philadelphia were the first two capitals of the United States.

The historical importance of the region is shown by the location of the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York, and the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Also, Ellis Island in New York Harbor was the entry point for millions of immigrants in the early 20th century.

As heavy industry spread throughout the region, rivers such as the Hudson and Delaware were transformed into vital shipping lanes. Cities on waterways—New York on the Hudson, Philadelphia on the Delaware, and Baltimore on the Chesapeake

AP/WWP

Annapolis, Maryland, is the state capitol and home to the United States Naval Academy. The governor's mansion is seen in the lower right, and St. Anne's Episcopal Church, which was established in 1692, is on the left. The current building was completed in 1859.

AP/WWP

The Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Museum of Art looms above the Fairmont Water Works along the Schuylkill River. Built in 1812 as a pumping station to bring clean water to the city's residents, the water works is now a restored historical landmark open to tourists.

Bay—grew dramatically. New York is still the nation's largest city, its financial hub, and its cultural center.

Among New York's countless cultural institutions are the Metropolitan Opera, the New York City Opera, the New York City Ballet, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Guggenheim Museum. The region's literary greats include short story writer and poet Edgar Allan Poe, poet Walt Whitman, dramatist Arthur Miller, and the contemporary novelists John Updike and Phillip Roth.

Like New England, the Mid-Atlantic region has seen much of its heavy industry relocate elsewhere. Other industries, such as pharmaceutical manufacturing and communications, as well as the service sector, have taken up the slack.

Regional foods include Manhattan clam chowder, Maryland crabs, Philly cheesesteak sandwiches, chicken pot pie, apple cider, New York bagels, and New York-style cheesecake.

The South

Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas

Major Cities: Atlanta, Georgia; New Orleans, Louisiana; Charlotte, North Carolina; Miami, Florida; Nashville, Tennessee; Houston, Texas

Literature: William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Robert Penn Warren, Margaret Mitchell, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Flannery O'Connor, Alice Walker

AP/WWP

The Tennessee State Capitol is located in downtown Nashville, which was founded in 1779 by settlers from North Carolina.

Like New England, the South was first settled by English Protestants. There was also an influx of French Huguenots, particularly into South Carolina, and, of course, there were many French settlers in Louisiana. But whereas New Englanders tended to stress their differences from the old country, Southerners tended to emulate the English. Even so, Southerners were prominent among the leaders of the American Revolution,

Courtesy of the Mississippi Development Authority/Division of Tourism

Stanton Hall, near Natchez, Mississippi, is an example of the hundreds of plantation homes that have survived throughout the Old South, remnants of a way of life idealized in the novel *Gone With the Wind*.

AP/WWP

The Storyville Stompers Brass Band performs outside K-Paul's Louisiana Kitchen in the French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana, in October 2005, amid signs of recovery following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

AP/WWP

Performers from the Penny Pavilion take the stage during the opening ceremonies of the 2004 Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina.

and four of America's first five presidents were Virginians.

In contrast to the rocky states of New England and the fertile valleys of the Mid-Atlantic where family farms flourished, the southern states relied heavily on an agriculture organized into large farms or plantations that grew labor-intensive crops, such as cotton and tobacco for markets in the North and across the Atlantic. To supply this need, plantation owners relied on slaves brought from Africa. But slavery became a contentious issue, dividing North and South. To Northerners it was immoral; to Southerners it was integral to their way of life. In 1861, 11 southern states left the Union intending to form a separate nation, the Confederate States of America. This separation led to the Civil War, the Confederacy's defeat, and the end of slavery. The scars left by the war took many decades to heal.

A section of the Atlanta, Georgia, skyline rises behind the Centennial Olympic Park as seen from the top of the CNN Center. AP/WWP

Over time, however, Southerners looked past these divisions, and in the late 20th century a new regional pride expressed itself under the banner of "the New South." Again, the South gained influence in national politics: Since 1976, the only president not from the South was Ronald Reagan. Jimmy Carter is from Georgia. George Bush and his son George W. are long-time residents of Texas, and Bill Clinton is from Arkansas. Also, the South has drawn international events, such as the annual Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina, and the 1996 summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia.

Today the South has evolved into a region rich in manufacturing, banking, and transportation. High-rise buildings crowd the skylines of cities throughout the region. Owing to its mild weather, the South has also become a magnet for retirees from other U.S. regions and from Canada. Whether retired or simply looking for a good quality of life, newcomers to these "Sunbelt" states are finding a modern mix of business opportunity and the style and flavor traditional to the South.

The literary wealth of the South is legendary, particularly in the 20th century, including William Faulkner's novels about life in Mississippi, the plays of Tennessee Williams, and the short stories of Flannery O'Connor.

Regional foods include southern fried chicken, grits, barbecue, and the French and Creole cuisine of Louisiana.

The Midwest

Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, and Oklahoma

Major Cities: Cleveland, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota; St. Louis, Missouri

Literature: Mark Twain, Carl Sandburg, Ernest Hemingway, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Langston Hughes, Sinclair Lewis, Jane Smiley, Jonathan Franzen

AP/WWP

This view of the skyline of Chicago, Illinois, the hub of the Midwest, includes Soldier Field (lower right), home of the Chicago Bears, a professional American football team.

AP/WWP

This street in Hannibal, Missouri, was made famous by writer Mark Twain in his Tom Sawyer stories.

The Midwest is a cultural crossroads. Starting in the early 1800s, Easterners moved there in search of better farmland, and soon Europeans bypassed the East Coast to migrate directly to the interior. In recent years, the immigrant population has continued to grow and diversify. There is also a large population of Native Americans. The region's fertile soil made it possible for farmers to produce abundant harvests of cereal crops like wheat and corn. The region was soon known as the nation's "breadbasket."

Most of the Midwest is flat and fertile, qualities that lend themselves to huge expanses of wheat fields. The Mississippi River has acted as a regional lifeline, moving settlers to new homes and foodstuffs to market. The river

AP/WWP

The Ingalls Homestead near De Smet, South Dakota, presents the archetypical vision of the Midwest, with its wheat field, livestock barn, and farmhouse.

AP/WWP

A light-rail train pulls up to the Lake Street/Midtown station in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

inspired two classic American books, both written by a native Missourian, Samuel Clemens, who took the pseudonym Mark Twain: *Life on the Mississippi* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Other Midwestern writers include novelists Ernest Hemingway and Toni Morrison, poets Carl Sandburg, Langston Hughes, and Maya Angelou, and the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, Sinclair Lewis.

Midwesterners are praised as being open, friendly, and straightforward. The region's hub is Chicago, Illinois, the nation's third largest city. This major Great Lakes port is a connecting point for rail lines and air traffic to far-flung parts of the nation and the world. At its heart stands the Sears Tower, one of the world's tallest buildings, at 447 meters. The region has other noteworthy cities, but perhaps is best known for its iconic small towns. The Midwest is sometimes called America's Heartland.

Regional foods include "Chicago-style" pizza and many German, Scandinavian, and Eastern European dishes that reflect the area's heritage. ■

The West

New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Utah, California, Nevada, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and Hawaii

Major Cities: Los Angeles, California; San Francisco, California; Denver, Colorado; Las Vegas, Nevada; Phoenix, Arizona; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Santa Fe, New Mexico; Seattle, Washington; Honolulu, Hawaii

Literature: John Steinbeck, Raymond Carver, James Welch, Wallace Stegner, Cormac McCarthy, Leslie Marmon Silko, Raymond Carver

AP/WWP

San Xavier del Bac Mission near Tucson, Arizona, was completed in 1797.

AP/WWP

A double rainbow forms at Hopi Point after a rain shower in the Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona.

Americans have long regarded the West as the last frontier, but California has a history of settlement older than most Midwestern states. Spanish priests founded missions along the California coast a few years before the outbreak of the American Revolution. In the 19th century, California and Oregon entered the Union ahead of many states to the east.

The West is a region of scenic beauty on a grand scale, ranging from lush forests in the northern portion to vast deserts

AP/WWP

Mount McKinley as seen from Talkeetna, Alaska, where climbers board small planes bound for Kahiltna Glacier to start their climbs of North America's tallest peak.

AP/WWP

Metropolitan Denver, Colorado, the "Mile High City," founded in 1858, now has a population of over 2 million. Its major industries are communications, utilities, and transportation.

AP/WWP

This view of the Seattle, Washington, skyline shows the Space Needle (left), built for the 1962 Seattle World's Fair.

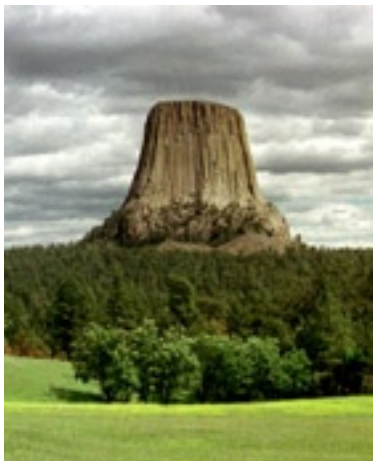
in the south. The magnificent Grand Canyon is located in Arizona. Monument Valley, the starkly beautiful backdrop for many western movies, is located in Utah and Arizona within the Navajo Reservation,

AP/WWP

With almost 1.5 million people, Phoenix, Arizona, is the fifth largest city in the United States. It averages 325 days of sunshine each year.

AP/WWP

The famous "Hollywood" sign sits on a hillside overlooking the intersection of Gower and Hollywood Boulevard.



AP/WWP

Devil's Tower, prominent in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, is located in Wyoming.

home of the most populous tribe of Native Americans. There are also dozens of other Indian reservations, including those of the Hopi, Zuni, Pueblo, and Apache tribes.

Other famous sights in the area include Devil's Tower in Wyoming (which you may recognize from the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*) and the Rainbow Bridge in Utah, the world's largest natural bridge.

In much of the West, the population is sparse, and the federal government owns and manages millions of hectares of undeveloped land in vast national parks, such as Yosemite, Yellowstone, Sequoia, and Death Valley. Americans use these areas for recreational and commercial activities, such as fishing, camping, hiking, boating, grazing, lumbering, and mining.

Parts of the southern area of the West were once part of Mexico. The United States obtained this land following the Mexican-American War of 1846-48. Its Mexican heritage continues to exert a strong

AP/WWP

The Hoover Dam near Boulder City, Colorado, is 221 meters high and 379 meters long on the Colorado River between Nevada and Arizona. Named for President Herbert Hoover, it is a major supplier of hydroelectric power and provides irrigation for more than 425,000 hectares in the United States and Mexico.

influence and the area has a large Mexican-American population.

Now the second largest city in the nation, Los Angeles is best known as the home of the Hollywood film industry. Because of the growth of Los Angeles and the "Silicon Valley" area near San Jose, California has become the most populous state. The regional population is growing rapidly, with Arizona in particular rivaling the southern states as a destination for retirees in search of a warm climate. Las Vegas, Nevada, is renowned as one of the world's centers for gambling.

AP/WWP

Members of the Santa Fe Opera Company in Santa Fe, New Mexico, rehearse Bellini's *La Sonnambula*.

In a region often suffering from a lack of water, dams on the Colorado and other rivers and aqueducts such as those of the Central Arizona Project have allowed once-small towns like Phoenix, Arizona, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, to thrive, turning them into metropolises. Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico, are famous centers for the arts, especially painting, sculpture, and opera. Water brought from far away has also made possible a wide array of agricultural crops, bringing diversity to the region's economy.

AP/WWP

Young hula dancers perform for tourists at the beach in Waikiki, Hawaii.

Alaska, the northernmost state in the Union, is a vast land of few, but hardy, people and great stretches of wilderness, protected in national parks and wildlife refuges. Hawaii is the only state in the Union in which Asian Americans outnumber residents of European origin. Beginning in the 1980s, large numbers of Asians have also settled in California, mainly around Los Angeles.

Westerners are known for their tolerance. Perhaps because so many Westerners have moved there from other regions to make a new start resulting in a mix of cultures, interpersonal relations are frequently characterized by a live-and-let-live attitude. The western economy is varied. California, for example, is both an agricultural state and a high-technology manufacturing state.

The most well known writers from the West are John Steinbeck, whose most famous work is *Grapes of Wrath*, and Zane Grey, who was born in Ohio and moved to California. His novels, like *Riders of the Purple Sage,* presented an idealized version of the Old West.

Western food is characterized by tremendous variety due to the diversity of its populace—Mexican, other Latin American, and Asian cuisines. And, of course, there's Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, California.

Many Americans, One America

As we noted at the beginning, the United States is a large country. The geographical diversity is obvious – rocky beaches in New England and the Northwest, sandy beaches on the southeast coast and in California and Hawaii, mountain ranges near both coasts, vast plains in the center of the country, huge deserts in the Southwest, frozen tundra in Alaska, and volcanic islands in Hawaii. Each region has special characteristics because of geography and because each region was settled by different peoples under different conditions through more than four centuries.

It is important to remember that, although the country is very large and the regions diverse, there are more similarities than differences among the people who call themselves "American." After all, this country's coins carry the motto "E pluribus unum" (Out of many, one), and this is an ideal that Americans take seriously.

"In many other countries, national identity has everything to do with who your parents are or the particular piece of land on which you grew up," Texas Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison said in a recent speech. "Being a true American has more to do with what you believe than where you are from. When immigrants earn citizenship, they are given the same rights and freedoms as every other American. It does not matter that their parents were not American. It does not matter that they cannot trace their family's lineage back in time to find an ancestor who shed blood in the Revolutionary War. The key to being American is sharing certain fundamental beliefs, such as the value of self-governance and the right to free speech and to worship as you choose." ■

AP/WWP

The Korean-American booth during "Meet the World" festival in Anchorage, Alaska, where 93 languages are spoken.

What Immigrants Say About the United States

"In America everyone is different. Everyone is welcome." Paul Pickman, a documentary filmmaker in Belarus, now owner of *Kaskad*, a Russian-language newspaper in Baltimore, *The Baltimore Sun*.

"When you come to the States, you come with the mentality of making money and succeeding. You don't think about society. After you are here for years, you start thinking about those things." Ernesto Diaz, director of logistics for Balducci's, a gourmet food chain in Maryland, *The Washington Post*.

"We stress the American Muslim identity, that home is where my grandchildren are going to be raised, not where my grandfather is buried." Salam Al-Marayati, executive director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, *Sacramento Bee*.

"Our kids have a good opportunity here to have a good education and have a good job." Suzana Hotaj, Albanian immigrant who works at Wal-Mart, *The Kansas City Star*.

"This is one of my American dreams, to be an owner of a business being run by immigrants who have a common goal." Silverio Moog, Philippine immigrant and one of 50 co-owners of a cooperative formed by the surviving workers from Windows on the World, the restaurant atop the World Trade Center, *The New York Times*.

"There are a lot of jobs around, good school systems, and lots of opportunities to open a business and get an education and learn English." Rahima Poljarevic, Bosnian immigrant, *The Kansas City Star*.

"When you come here as an immigrant, you are taking a chance, and that is what starting a business is all about." Michel Zajour, president of the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, *The Washington Post*.

American Thinkers on Values

Maya Angelou: "It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength."

Emily Dickinson: "Luck is not chance, it's toil; fortune's expensive smile is earned."

Peter Drucker: "The best way to predict your future is to create it."

W.E.B. DuBois: "Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, not some more convenient season. It is today that our best work can be done and not some future day or future year."

Amelia Earhart: "The most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity. The fears are paper tigers. You can do anything you decide to do. You can act to change and control your life; and the procedure, the process, is its own reward."

Albert Einstein: "The important thing is to not stop questioning."

Benjamin Franklin: "Energy and persistence conquer all things."

Ralph Waldo Emerson: "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better or worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on the plot of ground which is given to him to till."

Bill Gates: "With success, I have been given great wealth. And with great wealth comes great responsibility to give back to society, to see that those resources are put to work in the best possible way to help those in need."

Langston Hughes: "Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly. I have discovered in life that there are ways of getting almost anywhere you want to go, if you really want to go."

Garrison Keillor: "I think the most un-American thing you can say is, 'You can't say that.'"

Edward R. Murrow: "To be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful. It is as simple as that."

Mark Twain: "A person with a new idea is a crank until the idea succeeds."

Oprah Winfrey: "Surround yourself with only people who are going to lift you higher."

Internet Resources

Selected Web Sites about the United States

General Resources

Celebrating America's Freedoms
http://www1.va.gov/opa/feature/celebrate/
This site from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs contains "stories about some of America's most beloved customs and national symbols." Topics include the Pledge of Allegiance, flag etiquette, the bald eagle, gun salutes, and other patriotic subjects. Useful for planning activities or researching holidays such as the Fourth of July, Flag Day, Memorial Day, and Veterans Day.

CIA World FactBook: United States
http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/us.html
Official source of information about the geography, people, government, economy, communications, transportation, and defense of the United States.

Current eJournalUSA
http://usinfo.state.gov/pub/ejournalusa.html
Link directly to the current and archived electronic journals published by the U.S. Department of State's Office of International Information Programs. Journals cover themes related to economics and trade, international security, global issues, democracy, human rights, and U.S. society and values.

Information USA
http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/
This resource for foreign audiences seeking information about American society, political processes, official U.S. policies, and culture was prepared by the staff of the U.S. Department of State's Office of International Information Programs. Sections include: Facts about the USA, Economy and Trade, Media, Education, Arts and Culture, Government and Politics, Laws and Treaties, Society and Values, Science and Technology, and Geography and Travel.

Library of Congress
http://www.loc.gov/
From "the largest library in the world," this site offers access to eight million items online. In addition, through its online catalogs, research guides, and other finding aids, the site provides information on many of the books, recordings, photographs, maps, and manuscripts contained in the library's collections. Links to a number of useful resources are described in greater detail in entries below.

Smithsonian Institution
http://www.si.edu/
Often called "the nation's attic," the Smithsonian is comprised of several history, science, and technology museums, as well as art galleries, the National Zoo, a number of research facilities and libraries, and outreach programs. The site provides links to the museums, exhibitions, events, research, and membership information. Visitor's guides are available in a number of languages, including English, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic.

Publications from International Information Programs
http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/
The U.S. Department of State's Office of International Information Programs pursues a robust print and online publishing program. Ranging from the "About America" series (recent title: *Edward R. Murrow: Journalism at Its Best*) to the comprehensive Outline series (*Outline of U.S. History*, *Outline of the U.S. Legal System*, etc.), titles on this site are a premiere resource for international high school and university students wishing to learn more about the United States.

U.S. Department of State: International Information Programs
http://usinfo.state.gov/
From the State Department Office which "conducts, develops, and distributes public diplomacy materials in support of U.S. foreign policy objectives," this searchable site includes publications, current articles (Washington File) and other resources arranged geographically and thematically. Topics include international security, trade and economics, global issues, democracy, human rights, history, geography and population, and life and culture. Much material has been translated into French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Persian, and Chinese.

Geography

The 50 States
http://www.50states.com/
Provides detailed information about each state. Includes maps of states and capitals as well as state flags, symbols, population, area codes, zip codes, information on major cities, and numerous other facts.

City-Data.com
http://www.city-data.com/
Focusing specifically on U.S. cities, this site includes profiles, photos, maps, statistics, geographical data, statistics and other resources. It also includes Top 100 Lists of cities: highest income, least crime, newest houses, most females, shortest commute, best-educated residents, and so forth.

Columbia Gazetteer of North America
http://www.bartleby.com/69/
This searchable encyclopedia from Bartleby.com contains about 50,000 entries for geographical places and physical features in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean. The brief entries contain such factual information as population, longitude and latitude, and historical facts from the 2000 edition of the gazetteer.

Geography of the 50 States
http://www.netstate.com/state_geography.htm
Click on any state for detailed information about that state, including basic geographical facts, state symbols, famous residents, songs, history, government, newspapers, a message board, and an extensive list of links.

National Atlas of the United States
http://nationalatlas.gov/
Using this site from the U.S. Department of the Interior, one can create custom-made maps showing various physical features. Numerous statistics on the population, agriculture, climate, environment, geology and other geographic information are searchable as well.

National Weather Service
http://www.nws.noaa.gov/
Part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the National Weather Service provides forecasts, maps. travel warnings, and other information about the climate of the United States.

U.S. Geological Survey
http://geography.usgs.gov/
"USGS geographers monitor and analyze changes on the land, study connections between people and the land, and provide society with relevant science information to inform public decisions." The site provides geography resources from the U.S. mapping agency cooperating with more than 2,000 organizations across the country to provide scientific information for resource managers and planners.

Government and Politics

American Presidents
http://www.americanpresident.org/
From the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs, this site offers two perspectives on the American presidency: the Presidency in History and the Presidency in Action

Congressional Directory
http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cdirectory/index.html
This official directory features short biographies of each member of the Senate and House, as well as additional data, such as committee memberships and staffs. It also includes officials of other federal departments and agencies, governors, foreign diplomats, and members of the press. The directory is available online from the 104th Congress to date.

Constitution of the United States
http://www.gpoaccess.gov/constitution/
"The Constitution of the United States comprises the primary law of the U.S. Federal Government. It also describes the three chief branches of the Federal Government and their jurisdictions. In addition, it lays out the basic rights of citizens of the United States." This database from the Congressional Research Service provides access to editions and supplements to the text, analysis, and interpretations since 1992.

Core Documents of U.S. Democracy
http://www.gpoaccess.gov/coredocs.html
Grouped into cornerstone documents, Congressional, presidential, judicial, regulatory, demographic, economic, and miscellaneous categories," this online collection contains "the basic Federal Government documents that define our democratic society." Selected and authenticated by the U.S. Government Printing Office.

FirstGov.gov
http://www.firstgov.gov/
"The official U.S. gateway to all government information," this portal page from the U.S. General Services Administration contains a "powerful search engine and [an] ever-growing collection of topical and customer-focused links connects you to millions of web pages–from the federal government, local and tribal governments, and to foreign nations around the world." Also available in Spanish.

Government's 50 Greatest Endeavors
http://www.brook.edu/GS/CPS/50ge/50greatest.htm
The Center for Public Service at the Brookings Institution, which has been studying the work of the U.S. government for years, compiled this list of its greatest achievements at the beginning of the 21st century.

GPO Access
http://www.gpoaccess.gov/
From agency publications to the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, this portal page from the U.S. Government Printing Office provides access to official information from all three branches of the Federal Government.

Library of Congress: Guide to Law Online
http://www.loc.gov/law/guide/us.html
Compiled by the U.S. Law Library of Congress, this is "an annotated guide to sources of information on government and law available online." Selected links to authoritative sites for legal information cover the Constitution as well as the law of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the federal government and state law.

Political Science Resources
http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/psusp.html
These extensive U.S. government resources from the University of Michigan Library Documents Center are divided by type: comprehensive sites, blogs, cartoons, etc.; and topic: elections, federal government, lobby groups, political advertising, and more.

Politics Navigator
http://www.nytimes.com/ref/politics/POLI_NAVI.html
"A selective guide to political sites on the Internet" from the *New York Times*, this site provides a list of links to political parties, opinion polls, government data, political issues, media, commentary, and other information.

State and Local Government on the Net
http://www.statelocalgov.net/index.cfm
Using drop-down menus, this searchable and browsable state and local government Internet directory provides "convenient one-stop access to the websites of thousands of state agencies and city and county governments."

Stateline.org: Politics and Policy News, State by State
http://www.stateline.org/
Designed originally for journalists and funded by the Pew Charitable Trust, this site provides "timely tips and research material on state policy innovations and trends." Topics include state-level issues such as healthcare, tax and budget policy, the environment, and welfare. Stateline.org's annual report on state trends and policy, "State of the States 2006," can be requested free of charge.

The Supreme Court of the United States
http://www.supremecourtus.gov
The official site of the Supreme Court contains detailed information about the history and workings of the Court. Oral arguments, rules, guides, decisions, and opinions are accessible here, as well as a visitor's guide and other public information.

THOMAS: Legislative Information on the Internet
http://thomas.loc.gov/
Free Congressional information has been available through this database since 1995. Materials include the full text of bills, laws, and resolutions; proceedings and proposed legislation; the *Congressional Record*; schedules; calendars; committee information; presidential nominations; treaties; and other government resources. Some earlier materials dating back to 1973 have been added to the database as well.

U.S. Government Manual
http://www.gpoaccess.gov/gmanual/index.html
Comprehensive information on the "agencies of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches" as well as information on "quasi-official agencies, international organizations in which the United States participates, and boards, commissions, and committees" is available in the official handbook of the federal government. This handbook is searchable and browsable, with online editions available from 1995 to the present.

Understanding the Federal Courts
http://www.uscourts.gov/understand02/
"This publication was developed by the Administrative Office of the United States Courts to provide an introduction to the federal judicial system, its organization, and its relationship to the legislative and executive branches of the government."

History

AMDOCS: Documents for the Study of American History
http://www.vlib.us/amdocs/
Developed by a professor at the University of Kansas, this chronological listing provides links to approximately 400 documents selected specifically to assist high school and college American history students.

America's Historical Documents
http://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/
"The National Archives preserves and provides access to the records of the Federal Government." This site contains a sample of these records, from some celebrated milestones to some more obscure documents. It also provides links to the National Archives and Records Administration's home page, additional documents, online exhibits, research tips and tools, and other resources.

American Memory: Historical Collections for the National Digital Library
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/
"American Memory provides free and open access through the Internet to written and spoken words, sound recordings, still and moving images, prints, maps, and sheet music that document the American experience." Taken from the collections of the Library of Congress and other institutions, these materials "chronicle historical events, people, places, and ideas that continue to shape America." See, for example, the Learning Page's "American Memory Timeline" and the "Today in History" feature.

Avalon Project at the Yale Law School: Documents in Law, History, and Government
http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/avalon.htm
"The Avalon Project is dedicated to providing access via the World Wide Web to primary source materials in the fields of Law, History, Economics, Politics, Diplomacy and Government." External and internal links have been added to facilitate understanding and navigation of the items. The database, which is searchable by author and title or by subject or event, contains over 3,500 full-text documents, most directly related to American history.

Biography of America
http://www.learner.org/biographyofamerica/
This telecourse and video series presents American history as a living narrative. Divided into 26 parts, the series Web site provides "an interactive feature related to the subject or the time period of the program. . . a listing of key events of the period, a map relevant to the period, the transcript of the video program, and a 'Webography'—a set of annotated web links."

Documenting the American South
http://docsouth.unc.edu/
Sponsored by the University Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, this collection "provides Internet access to texts, images, and audio files related to Southern history, literature, and culture." Searchable by author, title, subject, and geographically.

History—North America
http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/rr_gateway/research_guides/history_us/history_us.shtml
This comprehensive guide to history resources is compiled by bibliographers at the Rutgers University Libraries. Links to Internet resources, online indexes and databases, bibliographies, major microfilm sets in American history, other library catalogs, and other services are provided. Access to several of the databases is "Rutgers Restricted."

History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web
http://historymatters.gmu.edu/
"Designed for high school and college teachers and students of U.S. history survey courses, this site serves as a gateway to web resources and offers unique teaching materials, first-person primary documents, and guides to analyzing historical evidence. [The] materials … actively involve students in analyzing and interpreting evidence." Created by the American Social History Project at City University of New York and the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, this site contains resources, such as an annotated guide to "the most useful websites for teaching U.S. history and social studies."

Outline of U.S. History
http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/histryotln/index.htm
"A chronological look at how the United States took shape. Published by the Department of State's Office of International Information Programs, this fully illustrated edition was completely revised and updated by Professor Alonzo L. Hamby in November 2005.

Population and Statistics

Diversity Bibliography
http://poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=1187&sid=5
Offered by the Poynter Institute, a nonprofit organization "dedicated to teaching and inspiring journalists and media leaders," this bibliography, updated in early 2005, links to online resources, including organizations and reports, and contains a list of books about diversity and the media.

Ethnic & Multicultural History
http://memory.loc.gov/learn/start/inres/ushist/ethnic.html
This site, from the Library of Congress's Learning Page, offers annotated links to nearly 40 resources showcasing the history of ethnic diversity in the United States.

Local Legacies: Celebrating Community Roots
http://www.loc.gov/folklife/roots/
From the Library of Congress's Folklife Center, this site contains photographs, written reports, sound and video recordings, newspaper clippings, posters, and other materials that document nearly 1,300 Local Legacies projects throughout the country. These collections demonstrate the "creative arts, crafts, and customs representing traditional community life; signature events such as festivals and parades; how communities observe local and national historical events; and the occupations that define a community's life."

Pluralism Project
http://www.pluralism.org/
The Pluralism Project: World Religions in America is a decade-long research project, "to engage students in studying the new religious diversity in the United States," with particular emphasis on "the communities and religious traditions of Asia and the Middle East." Materials on the site include scholarly articles and research reports, publications, and a searchable database of religious diversity news. "Resources by Tradition" includes directories and profiles of religious centers, news, links, and statistics, covering religious traditions from Afro-Caribbean to Zoroastrianism.

Population and Diversity
http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/history_geography_and_population/population_and_diversity.html
Current articles, links to organizations, government agencies, reports, statistics, and other material are featured on this site from the Society and Values team in the U.S. Department of State's Office of International Information Programs. In-depth pages focus on African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Women.

Population Reference Bureau (PRB)
http://www.prb.org
The goal of the Population Reference Bureau is to provide information on U.S. and international population trends and their implications. Useful publications include the quarterly *Population Bulletin*, the *Population Handbook*, *Reports on America*, and the recent *The American People* series. Searchable and browsable, the site includes a glossary and data sheets and is also available in Spanish and French.

State and County QuickFacts
http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/
The Census Bureau offers "quick, easy access to facts about people, business, and geography" at the national, state, and county levels on this site. Searchable by geographic region.

StateMaster.com
http://www.statemaster.com/index.php
Using statistics compiled for various primary sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the FBI, and the National Center for Educations Statistics, StateMaster combines them in a user-friendly graphical format designed for students, teachers, and librarians. The database allows you to research and compare a wealth of data on U.S. states.

Statistical Abstract
http://www.census.gov/statab/www/
The National Data Book from the U.S. Census Bureau contains a comprehensive collection of statistics on social and economic conditions in the United States as well as selected international data. It also provides a guide to sources of other data from the Census Bureau, other federal agencies, and private organizations.

U.S. Census Bureau
http://www.census.gov/
The mother lode of U.S. demographic data, this site includes statistics on population, housing, business and manufacturing activity, international trade, farming, and state and local governments. A few interesting features include the current Pop Clock, which gives up-to-the-minute population figures; multimedia services; the subject-oriented Facts for Features and the American FactFinder. The Census Bureau is also a resource for maps and other cartographic materials.

Travel

America's Byways
http://www.byways.org/
The National Scenic Byways Program, part of the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, was established "to help recognize, preserve and enhance" nearly 1,500 state and nationally designated byway projects. The site offers trip ideas, trip planners. travel information, and links.

Arizona Highways Magazine
http://www.arizonahighways.com/
Published by the Arizona Department of Transportation, the online version of this 80-year-old magazine contains exclusive features in addition to the articles on events, travel, hikes, and native plants and animals. The photography section features virtual tours and photo essays with full-color images taken by "many of America's best photographers." Links and maps are provided as well. This is but one example of the sites provided by the 50 states to assist travelers.

DiscoverOurTown.com
http://www.discoverourtown.com/
Brief listings and links to tourist information for selected cities throughout the United States are provided on this site. Information listed includes attractions, museums, lodging, dining, specialty shopping, and recreation. To access the information, click on a map or select a state.

MapQuest
http://www.mapquest.com/
MapQuest is one of several online services that help you map and find directions to locations throughout the United States. In addition to door-to-door directions, maps, and mileage, this interactive atlas contains trip-planning information such as city data, hotels, restaurants, attractions, and weather.

National Park Service
http://www.nps.gov/
This government Web site provides links to all U.S. national parks searchable by topic (historic sites, geysers, mountains, etc.) or by geographic location within the United States. Natural, historical, and cultural resources in the parks are featured as well.

Rand McNally
http://www.randmcnally.com/
A user-friendly interface leads you to free maps and route planning with detailed driving directions for the U.S. and Canada. Links to lists of hotels and nearby activities are also provided. Free registration allows you to save trip plans and addresses, though other site features require paid membership or lead to references to Rand's print atlases.

Recreation.gov
http://www.recreation.gov/
This site has links to information about several thousand federally owned or affiliated recreation areas. Entries include contact and weather information, directions, links, and available recreational activities (hiking, fishing, boating, cultural activities, camping). The site is searchable and browsable by keyword, site name, state, and activity. Once you locate a recreation area, you can view it and customize a map of the area.

Road Trip USA
http://www.roadtripusa.com/
"Follow route numbers or names to access driving tours along more than 30,000 miles of classic blacktop. Lively mile-by-mile descriptions celebrate kitsch oddities, local history, and apple-pie diners distributed over 10 yards of clickable image maps." In addition to the 11 routes described by author Jamie Jensen, the site includes a blog, a driver's almanac that explores a different location each month, a contest, and links.

Roadside Peek
http://www.roadsidepeek.com/
This searchable site offers a photographic tours of mid-20th century roadside architecture, profiling styles such as

Tiki, Roadside Vernacular, and Neon. Route 66 landmarks are accorded a special section. Coffee shops and eateries, drive-in theaters, bowling alleys, motels, signage, and automobiles are featured as well as a daily news update and links.

See America
http://www.seeamerica.org/
Developed by the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) in partnership with other travel industry organizations, this online portal includes "more than 10,000 links to hotels, airlines, attractions, convention and visitor bureaus, state tourism offices," and other resources. Available in Spanish, German, Portuguese, and Japanese.

NewsDirectory: Travel Planner
http://www.newsdirectory.com/travel.php?c=na&co=USA
This site provides access to Visitors and Convention Bureaus in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Links to airports, hotels, rental cars, and airlines can be accessed here as well.

U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs
http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/temp_1305.html
This State Department site offers information to temporary visitors to the United States. It includes details about visas.

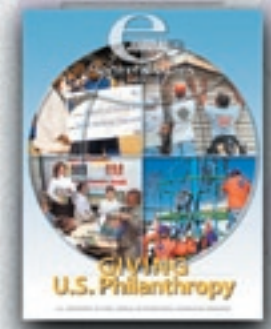
Voice of America News: Visiting the USA
http://www.voanews.com/english/travelusa.cfm/
VOA's thorough travel planner takes the tourist step-by-step through the process of visiting the United States, beginning with planning your visit, what to expect when you arrive, and information on parks, recreation, and scenic routes. A drop-down menu or clickable map of the 50 states links you to the official visitor's center of each state.

The U.S. Department of State assumes no responsibility for the content and availability of the resources from other agencies and organizations listed above. All Internet links were active as of June 2006.

"A MIND THAT IS STRETCHED TO A NEW IDEA NEVER RETURNS TO ITS ORIGINAL DIMENSION."

Oliver Wendell Homes

A MONTHLY JOURNAL ABOUT THE UNITED STATES OFFERED IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES



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