

Independence

Despite the prior existence of Native American cultures, the history of the United States as a nation state usually begins in 1492 with Columbus's 'discovery' of America. It wasn't until after 1600 that

- 5 European colonists began to arrive, mostly from England. By the 1770s there were 13 British colonies on the northeastern seaboard. Colonists came for many reasons, such as the desire to practice their religion freely or to take advantage of the
10 opportunities the 'empty' continent presented. Some were sent against their will to avoid prison or to repay debts.

- At first the colonies were dependent on goods and support from Europe, but over time they prospered
15 and became more economically independent. The main cause of the rift with Britain was dissatisfaction with the fact that they had little control over their own lives since all major decisions were made in London. Unrest came to a head when Britain set heavy
20 taxes on certain goods and the colonists refused to pay, unless they had representation in Parliament.

During the ensuing Revolutionary War (1775–1783) a committee of statesmen (known as the Founding

Fathers) came together to draft the Declaration of Independence. This document, written by Thomas Jefferson and announced on July 4, 1776, was to be the guideline for the Constitution of 1787.

The Founding Fathers ensured in the Constitution that the three branches of government – the executive (the President), the judicial (the Supreme Court) and legislative (Congress) – would share power in a system of checks and balances.

Today the Fourth of July is a federal holiday in the US, celebrated with fireworks, parades, barbecues,
45 baseball games and family reunions.



Yankee Doodle, 1776

40

Independence

Despite the prior existence of Native American cultures, the history of the United States as a nation state usually begins in 1492 with Columbus's 'discovery' of America. It wasn't until after 1600 that

- 5 European colonists began to arrive, mostly from England. By the 1770s there were 13 British colonies on the northeastern seaboard. Colonists came for many reasons, such as the desire to practice their religion freely or to take advantage of the
10 opportunities the 'empty' continent presented. Some were sent against their will to avoid prison or to repay debts.

- At first the colonies were dependent on goods and support from Europe, but over time they prospered
15 and became more economically independent. The main cause of the rift with Britain was dissatisfaction with the fact that they had little control over their own lives since all major decisions were made in London. Unrest came to a head when Britain set heavy
20 taxes on certain goods and the colonists refused to pay, unless they had representation in Parliament.

During the ensuing Revolutionary War (1775–1783) a committee of statesmen (known as the Founding

Fathers) came together to draft the Declaration of Independence. This document, written by Thomas Jefferson and announced on July 4, 1776, was to be the guideline for the Constitution of 1787.

The Founding Fathers ensured in the Constitution that the three branches of government – the executive (the President), the judicial (the Supreme Court) and legislative (Congress) – would share power in a system of checks and balances.

Today the Fourth of July is a federal holiday in the US, celebrated with fireworks, parades, barbecues,
45 baseball games and family reunions.



Yankee Doodle, 1776

40

Equality and freedom

Equality and freedom are cornerstones of American society. The Bill of Rights, which was added to the Constitution in 1791, explicitly guaranteed religious freedom and freedom of speech as well as equal rights and opportunities for all American citizens regardless of class or background. The separation of church and state, a key element in American law, has led to modern America having a wide spectrum of creeds and believers.

Yet equality and freedom were not granted to all American citizens automatically. After the Civil War between the northern and southern states in which its abolition played an important part, slavery was finally abolished in 1865. Even then it took the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to achieve equal rights for the descendants of those freed slaves.

American women also had to fight for their rights, not gaining the right to vote until 1920. The struggle for equality is still not over, as they only earn three-quarters of the average pay of American men.

Other minorities who have had to fight – and are still fighting – for freedom and equality are Native Americans and gays and lesbians.

The equality of the social order, which in theory offers equal opportunities for all, often has a more sobering reality. Education is free and available to all, but the quality of that education can depend on where a child goes to school. Higher education is often a question of money, with the opportunities for students from a wealthy home being greater than those from poor neighborhoods. And even in a democratic society there are class differences, a fact many Americans try hard to ignore.

Americans are proud of these ideals of equality and freedom. Their deep-seated patriotism is often regarded as arrogance by people in other parts of the world and can blind some Americans to any shortcomings within the country and in America's dealings with other nations. These factors are often the roots of anti-Americanism around the world.

Equality and freedom

Equality and freedom are cornerstones of American society. The Bill of Rights, which was added to the Constitution in 1791, explicitly guaranteed religious freedom and freedom of speech as well as equal rights and opportunities for all American citizens regardless of class or background. The separation of church and state, a key element in American law, has led to modern America having a wide spectrum of creeds and believers.

Yet equality and freedom were not granted to all American citizens automatically. After the Civil War between the northern and southern states in which its abolition played an important part, slavery was finally abolished in 1865. Even then it took the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to achieve equal rights for the descendants of those freed slaves.

American women also had to fight for their rights, not gaining the right to vote until 1920. The struggle for equality is still not over, as they only earn three-quarters of the average pay of American men.

Other minorities who have had to fight – and are still fighting – for freedom and equality are Native Americans and gays and lesbians.

The equality of the social order, which in theory offers equal opportunities for all, often has a more sobering reality. Education is free and available to all, but the quality of that education can depend on where a child goes to school. Higher education is often a question of money, with the opportunities for students from a wealthy home being greater than those from poor neighborhoods. And even in a democratic society there are class differences, a fact many Americans try hard to ignore.

Americans are proud of these ideals of equality and freedom. Their deep-seated patriotism is often regarded as arrogance by people in other parts of the world and can blind some Americans to any shortcomings within the country and in America's dealings with other nations. These factors are often the roots of anti-Americanism around the world.

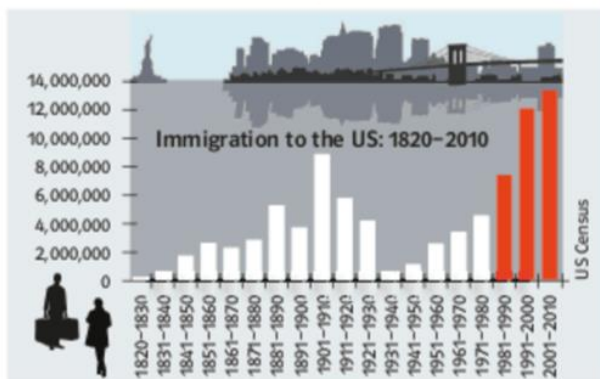
Immigration

The first Europeans to come to America were colonists or settlers and were mainly from Britain, Spain, the Netherlands and France. They all had to survive an arduous journey across the Atlantic. Many were driven by the desire to escape from religious, political or economic oppression and the belief that America would offer them a better life.

The peak periods of immigration were the mid-19th century (mainly from Northern and Northwestern Europe, particularly Germans after the failed revolution of 1848 and Irish during the famine years of 1845–52), the early 20th century (mainly from Southern and Eastern Europe) and post-1965, when a change in the immigration laws led to more non-Europeans entering the country. This eventually changed the ethnic make-up of the nation. While European immigrants accounted for nearly 60% of the total foreign population in 1970, they made up only 15% in 2000. This is due to steadily increasing immigration from Latin America – mainly Mexico, but also Cuba, El Salvador and the Dominican

Republic – and from Asian countries such as China, the Philippines and India.

America once saw itself as a melting pot in which these immigrants ideally gave up their way of life, language and culture and became part of a unified, monocultural American nation. But since 1970 this metaphor has largely been replaced by the idea of a multicultural and diverse America – a salad bowl in which different cultures mix, but remain different.



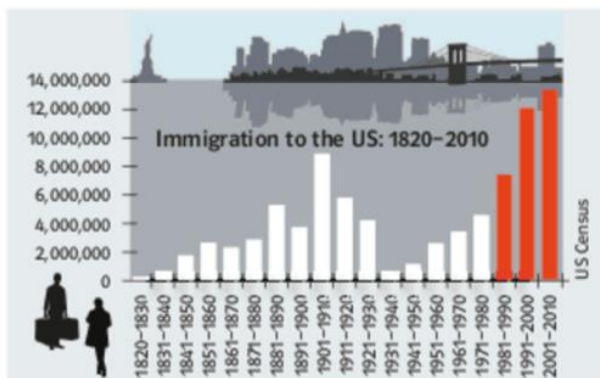
Immigration

The first Europeans to come to America were colonists or settlers and were mainly from Britain, Spain, the Netherlands and France. They all had to survive an arduous journey across the Atlantic. Many were driven by the desire to escape from religious, political or economic oppression and the belief that America would offer them a better life.

The peak periods of immigration were the mid-19th century (mainly from Northern and Northwestern Europe, particularly Germans after the failed revolution of 1848 and Irish during the famine years of 1845–52), the early 20th century (mainly from Southern and Eastern Europe) and post-1965, when a change in the immigration laws led to more non-Europeans entering the country. This eventually changed the ethnic make-up of the nation. While European immigrants accounted for nearly 60% of the total foreign population in 1970, they made up only 15% in 2000. This is due to steadily increasing immigration from Latin America – mainly Mexico, but also Cuba, El Salvador and the Dominican

Republic – and from Asian countries such as China, the Philippines and India.

America once saw itself as a melting pot in which these immigrants ideally gave up their way of life, language and culture and became part of a unified, monocultural American nation. But since 1970 this metaphor has largely been replaced by the idea of a multicultural and diverse America – a salad bowl in which different cultures mix, but remain different.



The American Dream

The American Dream is a set of beliefs and ideals which, in theory at least, allow every American the freedom to prosper and advance socially and financially through hard work. The concept is hard to pin down because there are individual interpretations. Some dream of fame and fortune; others of a fulfilled life or simply a life without state interference.

The idea of the American Dream probably began to take hold when Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1776 that Americans were born with the unalienable rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The phrase itself was actually coined by James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book *The Epic of America*: "The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for

everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. [...] It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognised by others for what they are, regardless of [...] birth or position."

For centuries people have come to America – and are still coming – attracted by the American Dream: the economic dream of success and prosperity ("from rags to riches"), the social dream of equality and opportunity, the political dream of democracy and justice, or the personal dream of freedom and self-realisation. While for many US citizens the dream is still alive, for many others it is an illusion or has – for whatever reason – even turned into a nightmare.

The American Dream

The American Dream is a set of beliefs and ideals which, in theory at least, allow every American the freedom to prosper and advance socially and financially through hard work. The concept is hard to pin down because there are individual interpretations. Some dream of fame and fortune; others of a fulfilled life or simply a life without state interference.

The idea of the American Dream probably began to take hold when Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1776 that Americans were born with the unalienable rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The phrase itself was actually coined by James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book *The Epic of America*: "The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for

everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. [...] It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognised by others for what they are, regardless of [...] birth or position."

For centuries people have come to America – and are still coming – attracted by the American Dream: the economic dream of success and prosperity ("from rags to riches"), the social dream of equality and opportunity, the political dream of democracy and justice, or the personal dream of freedom and self-realisation. While for many US citizens the dream is still alive, for many others it is an illusion or has – for whatever reason – even turned into a nightmare.

The American Dream

The American Dream is a set of beliefs and ideals which, in theory at least, allow every American the freedom to prosper and advance socially and financially through hard work. The concept is hard to pin down because there are individual interpretations. Some dream of fame and fortune; others of a fulfilled life or simply a life without state interference.

The idea of the American Dream probably began to take hold when Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1776 that Americans were born with the unalienable rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The phrase itself was actually coined by James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book *The Epic of America*: "The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for

everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. [...] It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognised by others for what they are, regardless of [...] birth or position."

For centuries people have come to America – and are still coming – attracted by the American Dream: the economic dream of success and prosperity ("from rags to riches"), the social dream of equality and opportunity, the political dream of democracy and justice, or the personal dream of freedom and self-realisation. While for many US citizens the dream is still alive, for many others it is an illusion or has – for whatever reason – even turned into a nightmare.