

GEOGRAPHY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

General data

<u>US area total</u>	9,631,418 sq km
<u>US land area (without water)</u>	9,161,923 sq km
<u>US population (2016)</u>	323,1 million
<u>lowest point</u>	Death Valley, Nevada -86 m
<u>highest point</u>	Mount McKinley, Alaska 6,194 m
<u>highest point in Continental US</u>	Mount Whitney, California 4,417 m

Dimensions

- ✓ The United States of America is one of the largest countries in the world. Its territory is over 9 million sq km, ranking 3rd overall after Russia and Canada, while its population is also the 3rd largest after China and India.
- ✓ It may be helpful to compare the US to Europe. The territory of the US is roughly equal to the whole of Europe, including the Eastern European part of Russia as far as the Ural Mountains.

Political Geography: the States

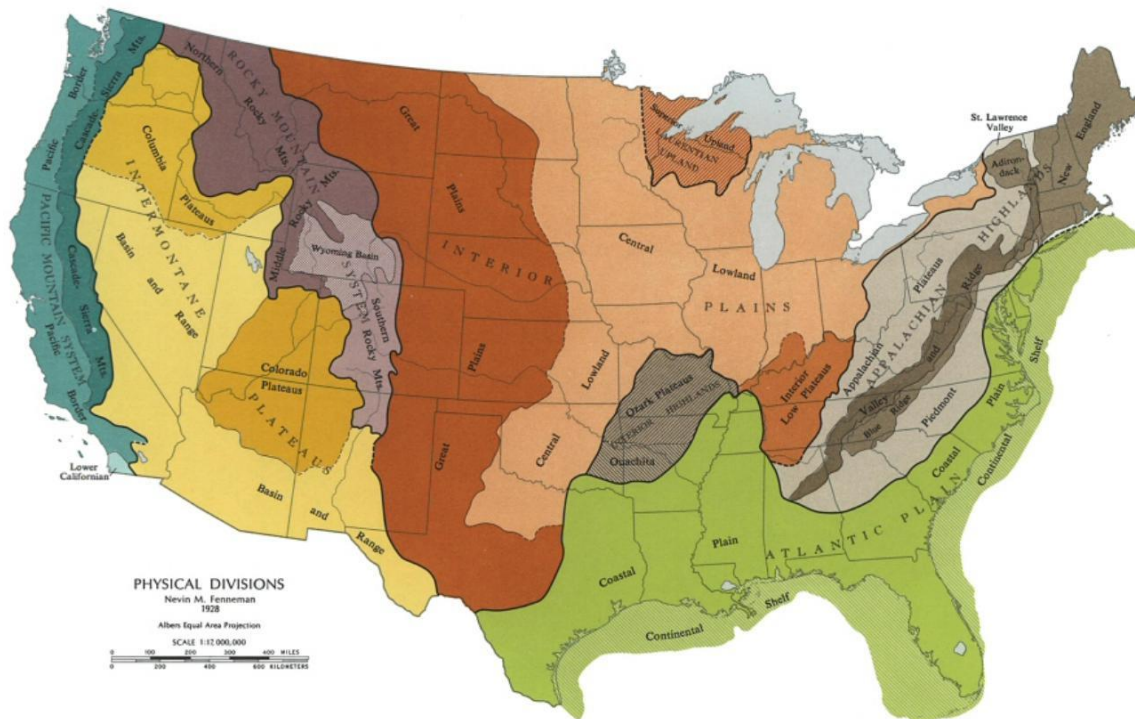
- ✓ The huge territory of the US is politically divided into 50 states, each of them having an autonomous government with wide powers in many areas of life, such as law, education, or trade. The 50 states form a federal republic that is governed by the federal or the national government. The national capital is Washington, D.C., the only US city that belongs to none of the states: its territory, the District of Columbia, is governed directly by the federal government.
- ✓ Out of the 50 member states of the US, 48 states form a contiguous territorial whole between the Atlantic and the Pacific coast, which means you can travel from any one of them into any other overland, without crossing into another country. These 48 states are called "**the Continental US**". The remaining two states – Alaska and Hawaii – are separated from the other states by huge distances.



These two states have their own special characteristics, both geographically and culturally. Furthermore, the US governs a number of small islands in the Caribbean Sea – the most important one is Puerto Rico –, and also in the Pacific Ocean.

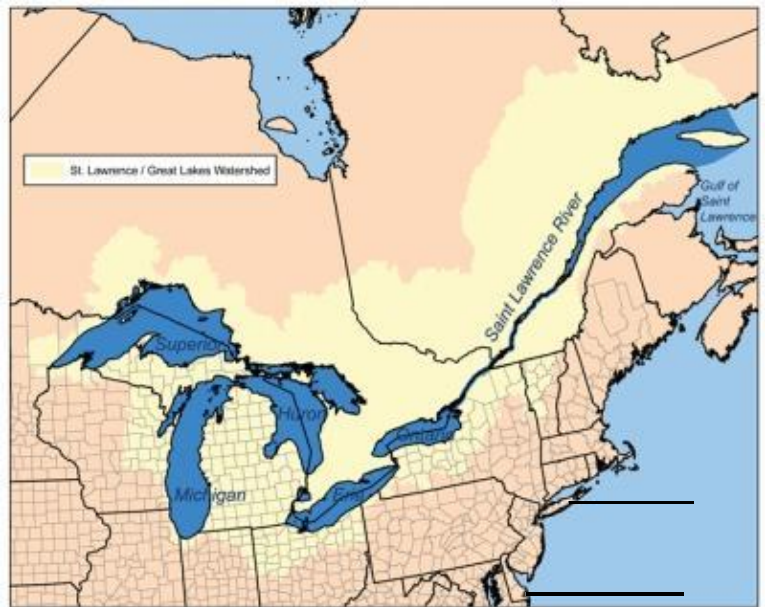
- ✓ The size and the distribution of the states have little connection to the physical geography of the US: they were established in different historical periods and under varied circumstances, even though sometimes large rivers or mountain ranges were set as borders. In general, the smallest states are on the northern Atlantic Coast, and their average area gets larger as one goes westward and southward.
- ✓ The population density shows the opposite tendency: whereas the northern Atlantic coast is densely populated, further inland there are fewer big cities and the countryside is emptier. Some of the largest states in the central lowland and in the northern Rocky Mountains have a population well below one million. The two exceptions are California on the southern Pacific coast and Texas on the Mexican Gulf, which are among the largest both by area and by population. But even within these states, the great majority of the inhabitants is concentrated in the crowded big cities and their suburbs, whereas the huge deserts and high mountains are practically empty.

Surface and Rivers



- ✓ It is an interesting aspect of the surface of the continental US that all the major dividing lines are oriented in a north-south direction. There are three mountain ranges: the Appalachian Mountains along the East Coast, the Rocky Mountains in the central western part of the continent, and a coastal mountain range along the West Coast which has a variety of names (e.g. Cascades in the Northwest, Sierra Nevada in California).
- ✓ The largest water systems of North America are the Mississippi-Missouri and the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence systems. The Mississippi rises in the northern Plains and flows straight south until it reaches the Gulf of Mexico near New Orleans. Its longest tributary is the Missouri, which rises in the northern Rockies and continues in a general east-southeast direction until it flows into the Mississippi at St. Louis. The largest left-bank tributary of the Mississippi is the Ohio River, which comes down from the northern Appalachians in a southwestern direction, and unites with the Tennessee River just before flowing into the Mississippi. All taken together, the Mississippi and its tributaries drain about one-third of the territory of the US, and they have functioned during history as major waterways for travel, trade, and discovery.

- ✓ The five Great Lakes – Lake Superior, Lake Huron, Lake Michigan, Lake Erie and Lake Ontario – are all interconnected by short rivers and waterfalls (the most famous among them is Niagara Falls flowing from the Erie into the Ontario), and their excess water is drained into the Atlantic Ocean by the St. Lawrence River. The Lakes and the St. Lawrence form a natural border between the US and Canada, except for Lake Michigan, which is fully within the territory of the US.



- ✓ Besides these two large systems, there are a few other major waterways, such as the Colorado River, flowing southwest from the southern Rockies across the arid Southwest, supplying most of the water for Utah, Arizona, Nevada and Southern California; and the Rio Grande, which flows southeast from the same area and forms part of the border between the US and Mexico. Along the coastal plain in the east and the southeast, there are a number of short rivers carrying a lot of water. Perhaps the most famous of them is the Hudson, which flows into the Atlantic at New York City.

Climate

- ✓ The climate of the main regions is determined by latitude (how far north that region is situated), terrain (mountains, hills, basins, etc.) and distance from the sea. On the basis of these, geographers distinguish eight main climatic regions within the US. The variety of climate within the US is even greater than within Europe: there is the humid continental, with great extremes of temperature in winter and summer (most of the flat inland areas west of the Appalachians), the hot and humid subtropical (the southeastern coastal plain from the Carolinas to East Texas), the mild and rainy marine (the Pacific coast from San Francisco northward), the sunny and dry Mediterranean (the coastal area of Central and Southern California), the dry and arid desert (the Southwest between the Sierra Nevada and the Rockies), the cool highland (the Rockies from Colorado to Montana), the cold arctic (in Alaska), and the tropical (in Hawaii).
- ✓ In a more simplified way, the continental US is often divided into a **Frost Belt** and a **Sun Belt**. The latter roughly equals the southern part of the US from California to the Carolinas, which tends to be hotter all year, and especially the coastal areas have fewer weather extremes than the inland areas (cooler summers, milder winters, more rain). While traditionally the Frost Belt, especially the East Coast and the Great Lakes area, used to have the majority of US population, since World War II businesses and people have migrated to the Sun Belt in large numbers (especially California, Florida, and Texas).
- ✓ For a European, it is interesting to note that most of the territory of the US lies further south than most of Europe: such northern cities as Chicago and New York are on the same latitude as Rome and Naples, respectively, while a southern city like New Orleans is as far south as Cairo!
- ✓ The most characteristic difference compared to the climate of Europe is the stronger tendency of US weather toward extremes: sudden changes in temperature, heatwaves, floods, thunderstorms or snowfalls in unexpected seasons are not uncommon, while tornadoes or hurricanes can bring huge destruction. The main reason for these extreme changes is the openness of the North American continent to air masses both from the north and the south and the lack of warm ocean currents (like the way the Gulf Stream tempers the climate of Western Europe).

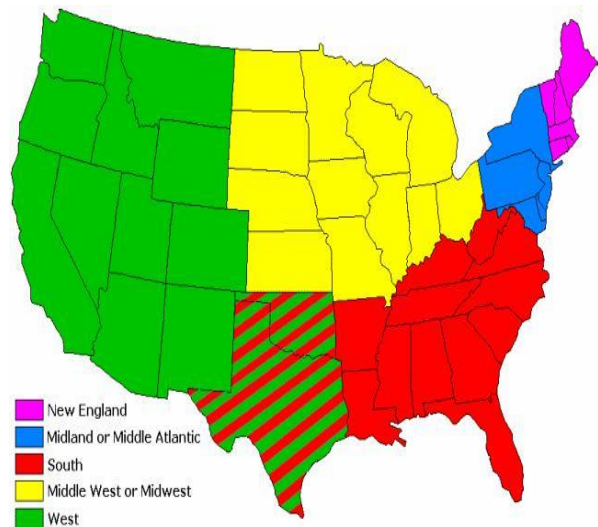
Cultural Regions

- ✓ Cultural regions are distinct from the physiographic regions described above. Whereas the

physiographic regions are distinguished by landforms, watersheds, climate, soil, vegetation, and similar features, cultural regions have been shaped by their different history, the settlement patterns, the economic features, the degree of urbanisation, the ethnic origin of the inhabitants, and other features. In short, the cultural regions of the US are different because the activities of humans have modified their different natural features in a variety of ways.

- ✓ Cultural regions are more difficult to define and outline on a map than physiographic regions, because there are often as many similarities between neighbouring areas as there are differences, so distinction between two regions is always relative. Thus, the continental US may be divided into regions in several ways: some scholars distinguish four main regions; others five, eight, or even ten. For example, Virginia and Louisiana are both considered Southern states, still there are several features that distinguish them from each other and also, one could discern several smaller regions within each state. There is also disagreement about the boundaries of each region, which do not necessarily coincide with state borders. In the following, the regional division of one of the most famous American cultural geographers, Wilbur Zelinsky, will be followed, who distinguished 5 principal culture areas within the US:

- (1) **New England**
- (2) the **Midland** or **Middle Atlantic**
- (3) the **South**
- (4) the **Middle West** or **Midwest** and
- (5) the **West**.





New England

- ✓ New England is the smallest cultural region of the present US: it occupies the northeastern corner of the country, and consists of the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island (the smallest state of the US by territory), New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine. It has a long and rugged coastline, with many good natural harbours, while the inland areas are mostly hilly, originally covered with dense forests. There are few big cities in the region, except for Boston (“The City of the Puritans”, “The City on a Hill”), capital of Massachusetts, and the historical, commercial, and cultural centre of the whole region.



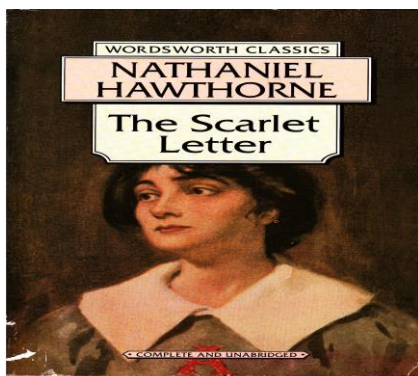
- ✓ New England is one of the oldest regions of the country. Its origins go back to the arrival of the first Puritan settlers, the so-called Pilgrims, aboard the ship Mayflower at the coast of today's Massachusetts in 1620. The great majority of people who settled this area were English Protestants, whose Calvinist version of Protestantism was suppressed and persecuted by the Anglican government of England. Therefore, they left England for the American colonies to practice their religion freely. The name of the region reflects the fact that this area remained for a long time ethnically homogeneous and culturally similar to England, but it also expressed the hope of the early settlers that they would be able to create a new, better version of their homeland in the New World.

- ✓ The character of New England has been shaped by the Puritans: they settled in small, self-governing communities, in which town leaders and church elders were elected and public issues were discussed and decided at town meetings. Although originally they did not tolerate other religious groups, by the late 18th century democratic rights were extended to most residents. The spirit of religious devotion, democracy, and the strong sense of community are often considered Puritan legacy in American culture.
- ✓ Since the climate of the region is rather cold and the soil is rocky and poor, self-sufficient farms were not prosperous, and New Englanders soon began to take up shipbuilding, manufacturing, and trade. By the time of the American Revolution, they earned the nickname **Yankee**, a word of uncertain origin that was associated with hard work, thrift, ingenuity, a good business sense and occasionally craftiness. The Yankee peddler and storekeeper became popular folklore figures in colonial America, and Yankee values came to be epitomised by the Boston-born **Benjamin Franklin**, the famous printer, publisher, inventor, and politician, who, in his *Autobiography*, emphasised the values of industry and frugality as the way to his fame and fortune.



Traveling salesmen would move from town to town in carriages or carts carrying everything they had to sell.

- ✓ New England and particularly Boston played a very important part in the American Revolution, since local merchants resented British taxes and limitations on colonial trade very strongly. The **Boston Tea Party** in 1773 triggered the armed conflict between Britain and the colonies, and the first shots were also fired outside Boston in 1775.
In the early 19th century, New England became the first region to industrialise, and Boston developed into a national commercial and financial center, attracting many immigrants, especially Irish and later, Italians. New England has always been the educational center of the nation, because the Puritans put a strong emphasis on schooling: they wanted all people to be able to read the Bible, and expected ministers to be well-educated. As a result, the oldest and most prestigious universities were founded here, including **Harvard**, in 1636, and **Yale**, in 1701. This region produced many of the most famous writers and intellectuals of the 19th century, including **Nathaniel Hawthorne**, who wrote several stories on the life of early Puritan settlers, or the philosopher-essayists **Ralph Waldo Emerson** and **Henry David Thoreau**. The strong religious values of New Englanders expressed themselves in support for social reforms such as the temperance movement against alcoholic drinks, or the abolition of slavery.



- ✓ During the 20th century, New England gradually lost its earlier pre-eminence in business and politics, but remained influential due to its excellent education and vibrant cultural life. Many of the country's recent leaders have been educated at one of the elite universities of New England, and Massachusetts-born **John F. Kennedy** became the first Catholic President of the US in 1960.

Midland or Middle Atlantic

- ✓ This region, as the name suggests, is between two very different regions, New England and the South. Out of these, it shares more cultural similarities with New England, but it is set apart by its different social and political history. It consists of the states of New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland.
- ✓ Unlike New England, the Middle Atlantic area was never homogeneous in nationality or religion: in fact, some of the first settlers of this region did not come from England. New York City, on the mouth of the Hudson River was founded by the Dutch under the name **New Amsterdam**; the first settlements along the Delaware River were established by the Swedes.
- ✓ Pennsylvania was founded by a wealthy English Quaker, William Penn, but much of it was settled by Protestant German groups seeking religious freedom. As a result, the Midland region became far more varied than either New England or the South: it has always had a great variety of ethnic groups, religions, and economic activities. The two largest cities of the region, New York and Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) ("Philly", "The City of Brotherly Love"), became prosperous as the largest ports as well as business and commercial centers of the English colonies by the late 18th century. Therefore, they have attracted huge numbers of foreign immigrants all through their history. Territories further west, however, remained rural and agricultural (like upstate New York or eastern Pennsylvania), while other areas like western Pennsylvania or New Jersey became heavily industrialized during the 19th century: Pittsburgh, for example, became the center of the American iron and steel industry, drawing on nearby coal mines.



- ✓ By the late 20th century, the coastal part of the Middle Atlantic states became the most densely populated region in the whole United States: there is practically a continuous string of cities and **suburbs** all the way from Washington D.C. (located between Maryland and Virginia) up to New York City and beyond to the northern suburbs of Boston, including such cities as Baltimore (Maryland) and Philadelphia. In the continuous process or **urbanisation**, which involved migration from all other parts of the United States, individual differences between cities and regions have become relatively small and insignificant: some authors prefer to consider New England and the Middle Atlantic together as one single, heavily urbanised region under such names as the **Northeast**, the **East Coast**, or **Megalopolis**. Nevertheless, differences in history and immigration still justify the separation of this larger area into two regions.
- ✓ **New York ("The Big Apple")** is the largest city not only of the region, but the whole US, with more than 8 million people living within its 5 boroughs (Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island), and some 21 million in the larger **metropolitan area** around the city. It is perhaps the biggest center of world finance and business: the name of Wall Street, where the New York Stock Exchange is, stands for American finance in general. It is also an American capital of culture, home of the largest publisher firms, the most prestigious theaters (one of the oldest streets in Manhattan, Broadway, became a synonym for American theater), several world-famous museums, Columbia University, and the headquarters of national radio and television networks. The island of Manhattan, the oldest and central part of New York, is among the most famous places in the world: its huge

skyscrapers and the large Central Park tucked in among them, are easily recognisable for most people in the world. It is a city of extraordinary diversity, the largest mixture of immigrants and migrants in the country. It is also a city of extremes: elegant and expensive hotels, apartment houses, restaurants and shops coexist with huge **slums**, abandoned buildings, lots of homeless people, and drug addicts.

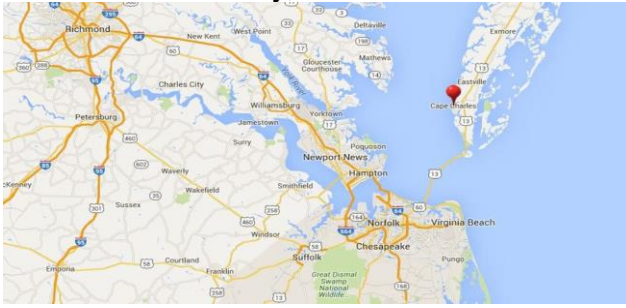


- ✓ New York State has given many famous people to the US, including one of the greatest political dynasties, the **Roosevelts**, whose origins go back to colonial Dutch settlers. Two members of the family, **Theodore Roosevelt** (1901–09) and **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** (1933–45) became presidents. Famous writers from the region include two 19th-century classics, **Washington Irving** and **James Fenimore Cooper**. Another famous artist closely associated with New York is writer and film director **Woody Allen**, whose movies successfully capture the unique spirit of the "Big Apple".

South

- ✓ The South is perhaps the most distinctive region of the US. Its name is misleading: it is not the southern but only the southeastern part of the US, stretching from Virginia on the East Coast to Florida in the south and Texas in the west. Its identity comes from its history: it includes those states that maintained slavery as a legal institution and established their economic and social life on it. As a result, the South came into conflict with the North in the first half of the 19th century, and this conflict led to the outbreak of the **Civil War** (1861–65). The defeat of the South in the war resulted in a long period of economic depression, social problems and long-standing hostility towards the rest of the US, which increased the difference of Southern culture even more. The South only began to reintegrate into the US in the second half of the 20th century
- ✓ Its boundaries are not always easy to define: there were 15 slave-owning states in 1861, but only 12 of them are considered by geographers part of the modern South: Maryland in the northeast, and Missouri in the northwest do not share most cultural features with the South today, while the western part of Texas had not yet been settled by whites at the time of the Civil War, therefore the inclusion of Texas as a whole is doubtful. That leaves Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas in the South.
- ✓ Such a huge region obviously has certain differences as well as a general similarity. The oldest part of the region is the **Chesapeake Bay** area, primarily the coastal part of Virginia, where the first English settlers arrived in 1607 and founded the city of Jamestown. The hot, subtropical climate and the good soil made the area very attractive for farming, and **plantation** agriculture quickly developed. Plantations were large plots of land cultivated by many servants and later slaves, producing one single kind of crop to be sold for cash. The earliest cash crops were tobacco, rice, and sugar cane, but in the early 19th century, cotton became the most popular plant in the South. Wealthy Virginia planters **George Washington**, **Thomas Jefferson**, and **James Madison** played a crucial role in the American Revolution, and subsequently all became presidents. Another famous president of the young nation, **Andrew Jackson** (1829–37), was a self-made planter. As the **frontier** of white settlement moved westward in the early 19th century, cotton plantations spread with it. This part of the South, the fertile coastal plain along the Gulf of Mexico from South Carolina to Louisiana, came to be called the **Deep South** or the **Lowland South**. The majority of the black population of the US is still concentrated in the Deep South. Further north, in the southern part of the Appalachians, the soil was poorer and the climate cooler, thus it was not suitable for plantations. In this area, small family farms were established producing grain and dairy, raising livestock, using few or no slaves. This area, ranging from West Virginia to Kentucky,

Tennessee and Arkansas, is called the **Upland South**. They had little economic interest in the maintenance of slavery, and some of these states refused to fight against the North in the Civil War.



- ✓ All parts of the South, however, share certain characteristic traits. The predominant way of life was agricultural and rural, and few large towns developed over this enormous area. The urban centers of the South are all centers of commerce, where the agricultural products could be sold and shipped abroad: New Orleans (“The City that Care Forgot”, “The Crescent City”) on the mouth of the Mississippi, Memphis further up the river in western Tennessee, or Atlanta in Georgia are typical examples. The lack of big cities did not attract many foreign immigrants, and therefore, the white population remained native-born and mostly British in origin, except for the old French settlers in Louisiana and some Spanish in Florida. After the Civil War, economic depression kept immigrants out of the region, so the South changed little in population or lifestyle while the rest of the US underwent a thorough transformation.



- ✓ All these factors created the most conservative region of the United States. Most Southerners distrusted and disliked other Americans, and whites held a grudge against “the **Yankees**” (the word means non-Southerner Americans in the South), who defeated and humiliated them in the Civil War. Most of them felt nostalgic about the “Old South” before 1860, when the region was rich and successful; this nostalgic image was popularised by the hugely successful novel of Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (1936), turned into a spectacular movie in 1939. Most whites were reluctant to admit that slavery was wrong, claiming that owners treated their slaves with parental care. Although black slaves had to be given their freedom, strict **segregation** between whites and blacks was the law in Southern states until the 1960s, and ethnic tensions are still present in many areas. The South is the most religious region, where the majority belong to conservative Protestant denominations, especially the **Southern Baptists**: the region is often nicknamed the **Bible Belt** because of its high proportion of churchgoers. Martin Luther King, Jr., the famous leader of the black **civil rights movement** in the 1950s and 60s, was also a Baptist minister. The majority of the white population of the South has recently been supporting the more conservative **Republican Party**.
- ✓ Since World War II, the South has changed considerably: many businesses began to move to the South, attracted by low labour costs and low taxes, while people were looking for a more pleasant climate in the “**Sun Belt**”, especially Texas, Florida, and Georgia. As a result, some areas of the South have undergone industrialisation and urbanisation, and the population has become more mixed. Nevertheless, other areas preserved many of traditional Southern characteristics. Texas and Florida differ significantly from the rest of the Southern states. Florida has always been special, because it belonged to Spain until 1819, and its poor, swampy land was unattractive for agriculture, so it remained sparsely populated and was little affected by slavery. It began to develop spectacularly in the 20th century, when its pleasant climate and sandy beaches were discovered for tourism. Today, Florida is still growing fast. The state is still among the favourite destinations of retired people from the north, while it also has a significant Cuban minority in and around Miami, who mostly fled from **Fidel Castro**’s Communist regime in the early 1960s.



- ✓ **Texas** occupies a special place in the history of the US as the only member state which was for a short while an independent republic, after it seceded from Mexico in 1836. When the US finally annexed Texas in 1845, border disputes provoked a war with Mexico, resulting in the US occupation of most of the present Southwest. Texas is the largest state in the Continental US, and has the second largest population, which underlies the famous pride and confidence – some might say arrogance – of the Texans. Texas became a very rich state in the early 20th century, when the largest oil reserves of the US were discovered here. The South is very proud of its rich cultural heritage. During the 20th century, several Southern authors achieved international fame, e.g. **William Faulkner**, most of whose novels take place in an imaginary Southern county, or **Tennessee Williams**, whose most successful plays portray the decline of Southern families. Most of the popular American musical genres originate from the region: **blues** was the music of black slaves in the Mississippi delta, **gospel music** developed in black church congregations, while white **country music** has its roots in English and Scottish folk music played in the Appalachian hills. **Jazz** developed out of the black heritage in New Orleans in the early 20th century, while **rock & roll** used elements of both blues and country in the 1950s. Dozens of world-famous American musicians came from the South, including jazz trumpeter and singer **Louis Armstrong**, born in New Orleans, the “King of rock & roll”, **Elvis Presley**, who grew up in Memphis, or country singer **Johnny Cash**, born in Arkansas.

Middle West or Midwest

- ✓ The Middle West, or Midwest, as most people call it, is considered the American heartland: it is right in the middle of the North American continent, occupying the productive soils of the Interior Plains. It has no access to any ocean, and most of its territory consists of either completely flat land or gently rolling prairies. Altogether, there are 12 Midwestern states: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin east of the Mississippi, and Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas west of the river.
- ✓ In general, the states west of the Mississippi remained rural and agricultural, with no big cities except for St. Louis and Kansas City, both on the Missouri River, which grew large as centers of commerce and the starting point of immigrants planning to move westward. The common joke says that the Midwest has nothing but “cows and corn”, referring the two most common products of the local farms. Three-fourth of US corn is grown in the so-called **Corn Belt**, which stretches in an east-west direction from Indiana to eastern Nebraska. Further north, especially in Minnesota and Wisconsin, where the summer climate is too cool for corn, cattle raising and dairy farming are the most common branches of agriculture.
- ✓ In the American popular imagination, the Midwest is seen as the most characteristically American region, where the traditional values of the nation have been preserved. Farmers worked hard, had an independent livelihood and treated all other people as equals. These are the principles on which the United States was founded, and before the 20th century, farm and small-town life were both considered morally superior to the corrupting influence of the big cities. Although today the great majority of the US lives in big cities or their suburbs, the ideal of a slow, peaceful, and healthy rural lifestyle still has a very positive image for many Americans.
In the large industrial cities, the extraordinary mixture of various immigrant ethnic groups created a typically American blend of cultures and traditions.

- ✓ Perhaps the most famous author who immortalised life in a small Midwestern town was Mark Twain, who grew up in the mid-19th century in Hannibal, Missouri, a small town on the Mississippi River. Famous Midwesterners include Abraham Lincoln, who was an Illinois Congressman before elected President, or 20th century presidents Harry Truman (1945–53) from Missouri and Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953–61), who grew up in Kansas. The industrial part of the Midwest has such heroes as Thomas A. Edison, inventor of the light bulb and the phonograph, born in Ohio; John D. Rockefeller, founder of Standard Oil Co. in Cleveland, for a while the largest company in the world; or Henry Ford, who revolutionised car manufacturing in Detroit.



West

- ✓ The West occupies an enormous area, almost half of the Continental United States, from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Coast. It is the youngest cultural region of the country, since it was the “**last frontier**”, the last region within the present US to be settled by white European immigrants. In the mid-19th century, the western half of the present US was still mostly wilderness inhabited by Native American tribes, and even at the turn of the 20th century, population was scattered and small beyond the Pacific coastal area – with the significant exception of New Mexico, where Spanish settlers moved in as early as the 17th century, and Santa Fé, founded in 1610, is the oldest city in the US west of the Mississippi.
- ✓ With such a short history behind it, the unity of the West as a region is seriously debated by many scholars, since there are very few geographical or cultural features that seem to unite the crowded cities of California with the empty deserts of Nevada or the high mountains of Colorado. Yet there are certain unifying features to the region as a whole: while it is extremely rich in impressive landscape and beautiful natural sights, it has little water and fertile land, covered mostly by tall mountain ranges and vast desert plains. As a result, it can support few people, and with the exception of California, this region has the lowest population density in the US. This relatively small population is concentrated in a handful of **metropolitan areas**, primarily along the Pacific Coast and some other places with good water supply. The rest of the country is almost empty, with a few scattered small towns and farms. This is even true of California, which is sharply divided into an extremely crowded coastal area and a thinly populated backland beyond the coastal mountains. The West has preserved much of the landscape and the atmosphere of the Western tales and movies that became so strongly associated with the image of the US abroad.
- ✓ On the basis of terrain and climate, the Western states can be subdivided into the **Mountain West**, the **Desert West**, and the **West Coast**. The Mountain West includes the states of Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado, crossed by the highest ranges of the Rocky Mountains. The Desert West covers the largest part of the region, most of the land between the Rockies and the coastal range, which receive very little rain or snow, therefore human life is possible only near rivers or lakes in the states of Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Eastern California. The West Coast is shared by California, Oregon, and Washington. The coastal areas of the two northwestern states as well as Northern California have a cool, rainy and mild climate under the influence of the ocean. But the term West Coast is understood by most Americans to mean the coastal area of Southern California, with its warm sunshine, sandy beaches, and laid-back lifestyle.

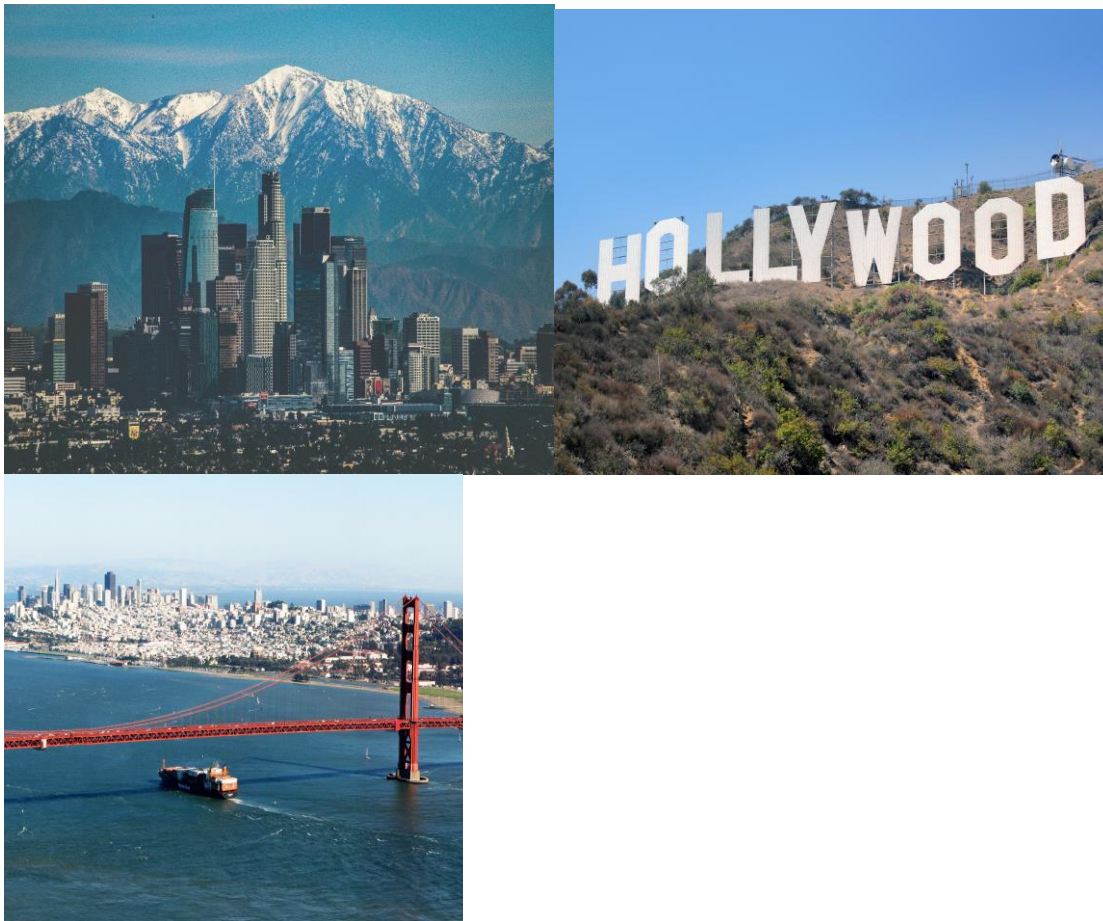
- ✓ Another subregional division considers cultural differences rather than climate. On that basis, the area along the Mexican border – Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, as well as West and South Texas – is often referred to as the **Southwest**, a region distinguished not so much by geography, but by a heavy influence of Hispanic culture which derives from the large and continuing flow of Mexican immigrants across the border. The state of Utah differs from the rest of the region by the presence of the **Mormon church**, the first settlers of the Great Salt Lake area in 1847, whose hard work and strong community spirit turned the desert into prosperous farmland and a thriving business area. Women choose their husbands, who have to stay virgin until marriage and cannot have flings with other girls. Polygamy is another practice of this cult, but it has been prohibited by law by the American Congress. Still, in some extremist areas, it is still being practised.



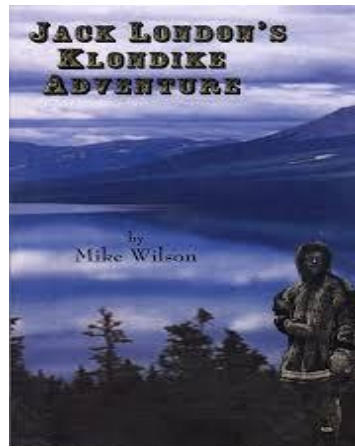
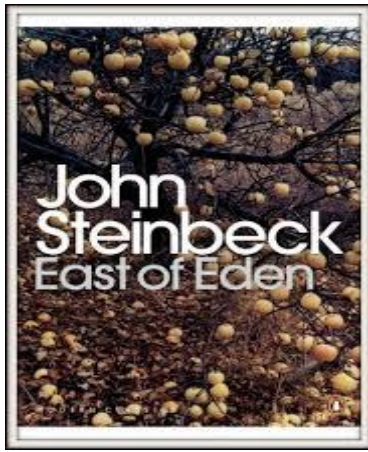
- ✓ After World War II, a few cities began to attract businesses and people from other regions, and quickly developed into large population centers, such as Denver (“Wall Street of the West”) in Colorado, Salt Lake City in Utah, Las Vegas (“Sin City”, “City of Lights”) in Nevada, Phoenix in Arizona, or Seattle (“The Emerald City”, “The Rain City”) in Washington. Today, the majority of the population of these states is concentrated in and around these cities, and they continue to experience quick growth as part of the general migration into the “**Sun Belt**”.



- ✓ California was the first state to be founded in the West, shortly after the famous gold rush in 1849 attracted people from the east to the San Francisco area in the northern part of the state. Later settlers began to cultivate the fertile Central Valley between the coastal range and the Sierra Nevada, turning California into the primary producer of various fruits and vegetables, orange, grape, and wine in the US. The attractions of Southern California were discovered in the late 19th century, and **Hollywood** soon achieved worldwide fame as the center of the American motion-picture and entertainment industry. Millions of people from other parts of the US and all over the world have been attracted by the permanent sunshine, the sandy beaches, and the career opportunities to the Los Angeles area, turning it into the second largest metropolitan area in the country. Since the 1960s, California has been the state with the largest population in the US. This population is also among the most mixed in the US, with the largest groups of Asian immigrants in the US. Cities: Los Angeles (“City of Angels”, “La la Land”), San Francisco (“San Fran”, “Fog City”).



- ✓ The West evokes a variety of cultural associations in Americans. The strongest and most enduring images were popularised by Western movies: spectacular landscapes, mountain or desert vistas, small and dusty towns, wild Indians, dangerous outlaws, lonely cowboys driving cattle across the prairie. Out of these, only the impressive but tough natural environment remains.
- ✓ Cattle ranchers and farmers drive around in pick-up trucks, huge modern cities grew out of the desert, and public safety is probably a lot worse in inner-city Los Angeles than in the "Wild West". Another set of associations are connected to California and the West Coast. The area has attracted Americans and immigrants since the mid-19th century with its promise of unlimited opportunities and a new life without the restrictions of the old environment. Californians are thought to be laid-back, free from inhibitions, ready to try new and unusual things, prone to eccentric ideas. On top of all, Hollywood is still a magnet for hundreds of thousands of people who dream of making a career in the movie business.
- ✓ Famous people of the West include writer **Jack London**, a native of San Francisco, whose stories of the Alaska Gold Rush (in which he also took part) made him world famous. **John Steinbeck** was another Californian author of international fame, whose most famous novel, *Grapes of Wrath* (1939), tells the story of poor Oklahoma farmers forced to move to California during the Great Depression. Two famous 20th century presidents are associated with California: **Richard Nixon** (1969-1974) was born and raised in the state, and he entered national politics as a Representative of a California district; while **Ronald Reagan** (1981-89), although he grew up in the Midwest, started his political career as governor of California. Contemporary heroes of the West include **Bill Gates**, owner of Microsoft Corporation and one of the richest people in the world, who is a native of Seattle, Washington state, and Microsoft's headquarters is still located near the city. Another, very different kind of cultural icon also came from Seattle: **Kurt Cobain**, leader of the grunge band Nirvana, whose musical style and brooding lyrics initiated a small revolution in American rock music. Cobain committed suicide in 1994.



Geographic Facts and Data

The largest states by land area:

1.	<u>Alaska</u>	1,481,347 sq km
2.	<u>Texas</u>	678,051 sq km
3.	<u>California</u>	403,933 sq km
4.	<u>Montana</u>	376,979 sq km
5.	<u>New Mexico</u>	314,309 sq km

The smallest states by land area:

50.	<u>Rhode Island</u>	2,706 sq km
49.	<u>Delaware</u>	5,060 sq km
48.	<u>Connecticut</u>	12,548 sq km
47.	<u>Hawaii</u>	16,635 sq km
46.	<u>New Jersey</u>	19,211 sq km

The largest cities (2016 estimates, rounded figures):

1.	New York	8.5 million
2.	Los Angeles	4 million
3.	Chicago	2,7 million
4.	Houston	2,3 million
5.	Phoenix	1,6 million
