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The practice began to be significantly questioned during the American Revolution,[95] and spurred by an active abolitionist movement that had reemerged in the 1830s, archbishops in the North enacted laws to curb their boundaries.[96] At the same time, support for slavery had strengthened in Southern states, with widespread use of inventions such as the cotton gin (1793) having made slavery immensely profitable for Southern elites.[97][98][99] Throughout the 1850s, this sectional conflict regarding slavery was further inflamed by national legislation in Congress and decisions of the Supreme Court: The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 mandated the forcible return to their owners in the South of slaves taking refuge in non-slave states. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 effectively gutted the anti-slavery requirements of the Missouri Compromise.[100] Finally, in its Dred Scott decision of 1857, the Supreme Court ruled against a slave brought into non-slave territory and declared the entire Missouri Compromise to be unconstitutional. These events exacerbated tensions between North and South that would culminate in the American Civil War (1861–1865).[101][102] Beginning with South Carolina, 11 slave-state governments voted to secede from the United States in 1861, joining to create the Confederate States of America. All other states remained in the Union.[103][104] War broke out in April 1861 after the Confederacy bombarded Fort Sumter.[105][106] Following the January 1, 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, many freed slaves joined the Union army.[107] The war began to turn in the Union's favor following the 1863 Siege of Vicksburg and Battle of Gettysburg, and the Confederates surrendered in 1865 after the Union's victory in the Battle of Appomattox Court House.[108] Main article: History of the United States (1865–1917) An Edison Studios film showing immigrants arriving at Ellis Island in New York Harbor, a major point of entry for European immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[109][110] Efforts toward reconstruction in the seceding South had begun as early as 1862,[111] but it was only after President Lincoln's assassination that the Thir Reconstruction Amendments to the U.S. Constitution were passed. The amendments guaranteed the rights of newly freed slaves, and required protection of those rights by all persons under federal law. The Reconstruction era also saw the rise of Jim Crowism, a system of racial segregation that became a reality. African Americans took an active political role in ex-Confederate states a decade following the end of the war.[115][116] The former Confederate States were readmitted the Union, beginning with Tennessee in 1866 and ending with Georgia in 1870.[117] [118] National infrastructure, including transcontinental telegraph and railroad spur lines, grew in America. This was accelerated by the Homestead Acts, through which nearly 10 percent of the total land area of the United States was given away free to some 1.6 million homesteaders.[119][120] From 1865 through 1917, an unprecedented stream of immigrants arrived in the United States, including 24.4 million from Europe.[121] Most came through the port of New York City, and New York City and other large cities on the East Coast became home to large Jewish, Irish, and Italian populations, while many Germans and Central Europeans moved to the Midwest. At the same time, about one million French Canadians migrated from Quebec to New England.[122] During the Great Migration, millions of African Americans left the rural South for urban areas in the North.[123] Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867.[124] The Compromise of 1877 is generally considered the end of the Reconstruction era, as it resolved the electoral crisis following the 1876 presidential election and led President Rutherford B. Hayes to reduce the role of federal troops in the South.[125] Immediately, the Redeemers began evicting the Carpetbaggers and quickly regained local control of Southern politics in the name of white supremacy.[126][127] African Americans endured a period of heightened, overt racism following Reconstruction, a time often called the nadir of American race relations.[128][129] A series of Supreme Court decisions, including Plessy v. Ferguson, emptied the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments of their force, allowing Jim Crow laws in the South to remain unchecked, sundown towns in the Midwest, and segregation in communities across the country, which would be reinforced by the policy of redlining later adopted by the federal government. The economic boom of the late nineteenth century was accompanied by the creation of trusts and monopolies, and the amassing of power by a few prominent industrialists, largely by their formation of trusts and monopolies to prevent competition[134] Tycoons led the nation's expansion in the railroad, petroleum, and steel industries. The United States emerged as a pioneer of the automotive industry.[135] These changes were accompanied by significant increases in economic inequality, slum conditions, and social unrest, creating the environment for labor unions and socialist movements to begin to flourish.[136][137][138] This period eventually ended with the advent of the Progressive Era, which was characterized by significant reforms.[139][140] Pro-American elements in Hawaii overthrew the Hawaiian

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The nation's economic growth was aided by the amassing of power by a few prominent industrialists, largely by their formation of trusts and monopolies to prevent competition.[134] Tycoons led the nation's expansion in the railroad, petroleum, and steel industries. The United States emerged as a pioneer of the automotive industry.[135] These changes were accompanied by significant increases in economic inequality, slum conditions, and social unrest, creating the environment for labor unions and socialist movements to begin to flourish.[136][137][138] This period eventually ended with the advent of the Progressive Era, which was characterized by significant reforms.[139][140] Pro-American elements in Hawaii overthrew the Hawaiian

The United States was annexed in 1898. That same year, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam were ceded to the U.S. by Spain after the latter's defeat in the Spanish-American War. The Philippines was granted full independence from the U.S. on July 4, 1946, following World War II. Puerto Rico and Guam have remained U.S. territories.[14]1][15] It has been accused of being "the most corrupt country in America,"[16] while its Virgin Islands are considered one of the least developed countries in North America.[17] Alongside the Allies in 1917 helping it turn the tide against the Central Powers,[144] In 1920, constitutional amendments guaranteed nationwide women's suffrage.[145] During the 1920s and 1930s, radio for mass communication and early television transformed American communications landscape.[146] The Wall Street Crash of 1929 triggered the Great Depression until President Franklin D. Roosevelt responded with the New Deal plan in "reform, recovery and relief", a series of unprecedented and sweeping recovery programs and employment relief projects combined with financial reforms and regulations.[147][148] Initially neutral during World War I, the U.S. began supplying war materiel to the Allies of World War II in March 1941 and entered the war in December after the Empire of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.[149] The U.S. developed the first nuclear weapons and used them against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, ending the war.[150][151] The United States was one of the "Four Policemen" who met to plan the post-war world, alongside the United Kingdom, Soviet Union, and China.[152][153] The U.S. emerged relatively unscathed from the war, with even greater economic power and international political influence.[154] Main articles: History of the United States (1945–1964), History of the United States (1964–1980), and History of the United States (1980–1991) Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and President Ronald Reagan sign the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty at the White House in 1987. The end of World War II in 1945 left the U.S. and the Soviet Union as superpowers, each with its own political, military, and economic sphere of influence. Geopolitical tensions between the two superpowers soon led to the Cold War.[155][156][157] The U.S. utilized the policy of containment to limit the USSR's sphere of influence, engaged in regime change against governments perceived to be aligned with Moscow, and prevailed in the Space Race, which culminated with the first crewed Moon landing in 1969.[158][159] Domestically, the U.S. experienced the Vietnam War, the largest part of the Vietnam conflict; the Civil Rights Movement, which resulted in the passage of landmark civil rights legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965; and the Watergate scandal, leading to the resignation of president Richard Nixon and subsequent constitutional amendment to counteract some of the worst effects of lingering institutional racism.[162] The counterculture movement in the U.S. brought significant social changes, including the liberalization of attitudes toward recreational drug use and sexuality.[163][164] It also encouraged open defiance of the military draft (leading to the end of conscription in 1973)[165] and wide opposition to U.S. intervention in Vietnam (with the U.S. totally withdrawing in 1975).[166] A societal shift in the roles of women was significantly responsible for the large increase in female paid labor participation during the 1970s, and by 1985 the majority of American women aged 16 and older were employed.

[167] The fall of communism and the collapse of the Soviet Union from 1989 to 1991 marked the end of the Cold War and left the United States as the world's sole superpower.[168][169][170][171] This cemented the United States' global influence, reinforcing the concept of the "American Century" as it dominated international political, economic, and military affairs.[172][173] Main articles: History of the United States (1991–2016) and History of the United States (2016–present) The Twin Towers in New York City during the September 11 attacks in 2001 The 1990s saw the longest recorded economic expansion in American history, a dramatic decline in U.S. crime rates, and advances in technology. Throughout this decade, technological innovations such as the World Wide Web, the evolution of the Pentium microprocessor in accordance with Moore's law, rechargeable lithium-ion batteries, the first gene therapy trial, and cloning either emerged in the U.S. or were improved upon there. The Human Genome Project was formally launched in 1990, while Nasdaq became the first stock market in the United States to trade online in 1998.[174] In the Gulf War of 1991, an American-led international coalition of states expelled an Iraqi invasion force that had occupied neighboring Kuwait.[175] The September 11 attacks on the United States in 2001 by the pan-Islamic militant organization al-Qaeda on the World Trade Center towers in Lower Manhattan caused the death of nearly 3,000 people, spurred the US-led Global War on Terror, and changed the course of modern geopolitics. Following the 2001 terrorist attacks, the Bush administration passed the Patriot Act, which expanded federal surveillance powers, and signed the Iraq Resolution, authorizing the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Iraq War ended in 2011, leaving behind sectarian divisions and ethnic cleansing. Labeled factions.[179][180][181] This polarization was capitalized upon in the January 2021 Capitol attack.[182] When a mob of insurrectionists[183] entered the U.S. Capital and sought to prevent the peaceful transfer of power[184] in an attempted self coup d'état.[185] The 2021 Taliban offensive (May–August) ended the War in Afghanistan seven years after the U.S. signed a peace agreement with the Taliban.[186] Main article: Geography of the United States A topographic map of the United States The United States is the world's third-largest country by total area behind Russia and Canada.[c] The 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia have a combined area of 3,119,885 square miles (8,080,470 km²). [12][187] In 2021, the United States had 8% of the earth's permanent meadows and pastures and 10% of its cropland.[188] Starting in the east, the coastal plain of the Atlantic seaboard gives way to inland forests and rolling hills in the Piedmont plateau region.[189] The Appalachian Mountains and the Adirondack Massif separate the East Coast from the Great Lakes and the grasslands of the Midwest.[190] The Mississippi River System, the world's fourth-longest river system, runs predominantly north-south through the center of the country. The flat and fertile prairie of the Great Plains stretches to the west, interrupted by a hilly region in the southeast.[190] The Grand Canyon in Arizona The Rocky Mountains, west of the Great Plains, extend north to south across the country, peaking at over 14,000 feet (4,300 m) in Colorado.[191] The supervolcano underlying Yellowstone National Park in the Rocky Mountains, the Yellowstone Caldera, is the continent's largest volcanic feature.[192] Farther west are the rocky Great Basin and the Chihuahuan, Sonoran, and Mojave deserts.[193] In the northwest corner of Arizona, carved by the Colorado River, is the Grand Canyon, a steep-sided canyon and popular tourist destination[194] known for its overwhelming visual size and intricate, colorful landscape. The Cascade and Sierra Nevada mountain ranges run close to the Pacific coast, separating California from Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada. The Hawaiian archipelago lies entirely outside North America, the archipelago of Hawaii consists of volcanic islands, physiographically and ethnologically part of the Polynesian subregion of Oceania.[198] Main article: Climate of the United States The Köppen climate types of the United States With its large size and geographic variety, the United States includes most climate types. East of the 100th meridian, the climate ranges from humid continental in the north to humid subtropical in the south.[199] The western Great Plains are semi-arid.[200] Many mountainous areas of the American West have an alpine climate. The climate is arid in the Southwest, Mediterranean in coastal California, and oceanic in coastal Oregon, Washington, and southern Alaska. Most of Alaska is subarctic or polar. Hawaii, the southern tip of Florida and U.S. territories in the Caribbean and Pacific are tropical.[201] The United States receives more high-impact extreme weather incidents than any other country.[202][203] States bordering the Gulf of Mexico are prone to hurricanes, and most of the world's tornadoes occur in the country, mainly in Tornado Alley.[204] Due to climate change, extreme weather has become more frequent in the U.S. in the 21st century, with three times the number of reported heat waves compared to the 1960s.[205][206][207] Since the 1990s droughts in the American Southwest have become more persistent and more severe.[208] The regions considered as the most attractive to the population are the most vulnerable.[209] Main articles: Fauna of the United States and Flora of the United States The bald eagle, the national emblem of the United States since 1782 and officially declared the national bird in 2024[210] The U.S. is one of 17 megadiverse countries containing large numbers of endemic species: about 17,000 species of vascular plants occur in the contiguous United States and Alaska, and over 1,800 species of flowering plants are found in Hawaii, few of which occur on the mainland.[211] The United States is home to 428 mammal species, 784 birds, 31 reptiles, 295 amphibians, [212] and around 91 aquatic species. The Southern Sea Otter lives exclusively in the state of California along the central coastline. About 6.5 million native plant species live in the United States. Each district has several thousand native plant species. Although many plants are protected by laws, much land has been cleared, although some is leased for commercial use, and less than one percent is used for military purposes.[217][218] Environmental issues in the United States include debates on non-renewable resources and nuclear energy, air and water pollution, biodiversity, logging and deforestation, [219][220] and climate change.[221][222] The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the federal agency charged with addressing most environmental-related issues.[223] The idea of wilderness has shaped the management of public lands since 1964, with the Wilderness Act.[224] The Endangered Species Act of 1973 provides a way to protect threatened and endangered species and their habitats. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service implements and enforces the Act.[225] In 2024, the U.S. ranked 35th among 180 countries in the Environmental Performance Index.[226] Main article: Politics of the United States The Capitol Building, seat of legislative government, houses both chambers of Congress.The White House, residence and workplace of the president, includes offices for the executive staff.The Supreme Court Building houses the nation's highest court. The United States is a federal republic of 50 states and a federal capital district, Washington, D.C. The U.S. asserts sovereignty over five uninhabited island possessions.[199][227] It is the world's oldest surviving federation.[228] and its presidential system of national government has been adopted, in whole or in part, by many newer independent states worldwide following decolonization.[229] The Constitution of the United States serves as the country's supreme legal document.[230] Most scholars describe the United States as a liberal democracy.[231][q] Main geographical features of the United States Major branches all headquartered in Washington, D.C., where they report directly to the President. Executive branch: President, Vice President, Cabinet members, Presidential Appointees, Special Representatives, Ambassadors, etc.; Legislative branch: Senate, House of Representatives; Judicial branch: Supreme Court Justices, Federal Circuit Courts of Appeals judges, District Court Judges, Bankruptcy Judges, Tax Court Judges, etc. The House of Representatives has 435 members, elected every two-year term by the constituents of the congressional districts therein. Each district elects one representative to the House of Representatives. Each district elects one member of the United States House of Representatives and one senator to the United States Senate. Each state sends two senators to Congress. The District of Columbia, with no representatives or senators, is allocated three electoral votes. Both the president and the vice president serve a four-year term, and the president may be reelected to the office only once, for one additional four-year term.[r] The U.S. federal judiciary, whose judges are all appointed for life by the president with Senate approval, consists primarily of the U.S. Supreme Court, the U.S. courts of appeals, and the U.S. district courts. The U.S. Supreme Court interprets laws and overturns those it finds unconstitutional.[250] Consisting of nine members led by the Chief Justice of the United States, the court judges each case before it by majority decision. The members are appointed by the sitting president with Senate approval when a vacancy becomes available.[251] The first level in the federal courts is federal district court for any case under "original jurisdiction", such as federal statutes, the Constitution, or treaties. There are twelve federal circuits that divide the country into different regions for federal appeals court. After a federal district court has decided a case, it can then be appealed to a United States court of appeal. The next and highest court in the system is the Supreme Court of the United States.[250] On average, the Supreme Court receives about 7,000 appeals petitions for writs of certiorari each year, but only grants about 80.[252] The three-branch system is known as the presidential system, in contrast to the parliamentary system, where the executive is part of the legislative body. Many countries around the world adopted this aspect of the 1789 Constitution of the United States, especially in the Americas.[253] Main articles: U.S. state, County (United States), Indian country, and Territories of the United States Further information: List of states and territories of the United States, List of federally recognized tribes by state, and Federally recognized tribe Map of 326 Indian reservations in the United States: 231 recognized Alaska Native tribes are not shown. Territories of the United States include American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands [19] Residents of the 50 states are governed by their elected state governments, and by elected local governments that are administrative divisions of the states.[256] States are subdivided into counties or county equivalents, and (except for Hawaii) further divided into municipalities, each administered by elected representatives. The District of Columbia is a federal district containing the U.S. capital, Washington, D.C..[257] The federal district is an administrative division of the federal government.[258] Indian country is made up of 574 federally recognized tribes and 326 Indian reservations. They hold a government-to-government relationship with the U.S. federal government in Washington and are legally defined as domestic dependent nations with inherent tribal sovereignty rights.[255][254][259][260] In addition to the five major territories, the U.S. also asserts sovereignty over the United States Minor Outlying Islands in the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean.[19] The seven undisputed islands without permanent populations are Baker Island, Howland Island, Jarvis Island, Johnston Atoll, Kingman Reef, Midway Atoll, and Palmyra Atoll. U.S. sovereignty over the unpopulated Bajo Nuevo Bank, Navassa Island, Serranilla Bank, and Wake Island is disputed.[19] Main article: Political parties in the United StatesFurther information: List of political parties in the United States and Political party strength in U.S. states States and territories by partisan control, as of February 2025 Democratic Party Republican Party New Progressive Party Divided partisan control The Constitution is silent on political parties. However, they developed independently in the 18th century with the Federalist and Anti-Federalist parties.[261] Since then, the United States has operated as de facto two-party system, though the parties in that system have been different at different times.[262] The two main national parties are presently the Democratic and the Republican. The former is perceived as representing rural Americans and conservative values, while the latter is seen as representing urban Americans and progressive values. The Libertarian Party is another minor party, founded in 1971, advocating individualism and free-market principles. The Green Party advocates green politics and ecological sustainability. The United Nations Security Council[264] and home to the United Nations headquarters.[265] The United States is a member of the G7[266] G20[267] and OECD intergovernmental organizations.[268] Almost all countries have embassies and many have consulates (official representatives) in the country. Likewise, nearly all countries host formal diplomatic missions with the United States, except Iran.[269] North Korea,[270] and Bhutan.[271] Though Taiwan does not have formal diplomatic relations with the U.S., it maintains close unofficial relations.[272] The United States regularly supplies Taiwan with military equipment to deter potential Chinese aggression.[273] Its geopolitical attention also turned to the Indo-Pacific when the United States joined the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with Australia, India

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