

Key Dates and Core Contexts in U.S.-American History

- c. 15,000 BC Bands of **Stone Age hunter-gatherers** cross from present-day Siberia via Bering Strait into present-day Alaska
- c. 800 BC–100 AD **Adena culture** in today's Ohio region constitutes a seminal post-Archaic indigenous civilization
- c. 100 BC–500 AD Widely dispersed native populations in the Midwest, connected by trade routes and cultural exchange, establish the **Hopewell tradition**
- c. 850 **Great Plains Indians** begin practicing agriculture, while **Eastern Woodlands** and **Atlantic Coast** populations engage in hunting, farming, trading, and warring
- c. 900–1450 Cahokia in present-day Illinois forms the largest city and religious center of the indigenous **Mississippian culture**, spanning from Southeastern through Midwestern regions
- c. 1000 **Leif Erikson** from Iceland is probably the first European person to set foot on continental North America, establishing a temporary settlement in Newfoundland, Canada
- c. 1100–1300 Cultural golden age of the **Ancestral Puebloans**, a major indigenous civilization in the Southwest
- 1450 **Iroquois Federation** formed in the Northeast
- 1492 **Christopher Columbus** arrives in the Bahamas, on his first of four “voyages of discovery” financed by the Spanish Crown
- 1526 Spanish explorers bring first **African slaves** to present-day South Carolina; major **Spanish colonial settlements** become erected in present-day Florida (1565), New Mexico (1609), as well as in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America
- 1607 First permanent English settlement in the Americas is established in **Jamestown**, Virginia, by explorers and adventurers financed by the London Company
- 1619 Twenty indentured African servants arrive in Jamestown, which starts British involvement and dominance in the **transatlantic slave trade**
- 1620 Some one hundred secular settlers and so-called “**Pilgrims**,” religious separatists from the Church of England led by **William Bradford**, land at Cape Cod aboard the *Mayflower* and found **Plymouth Plantation**
- 1621 Plymouth settlers are helped by the nearby **Wampanoag** Indians to survive their first winter, and subsequently hold the first Thanksgiving together
- 1624 Dutch West India Company establishes **New Amsterdam** in South Manhattan
- 1630 **Puritan settlers** found **Massachusetts Bay Colony** at Boston, initiating the transatlantic passage of some 20,000 English colonists in the following two decades; Governor **John Winthrop** delivers his programmatic “**City upon a Hill**” sermon before the first emigrant group
- 1636 Foundation of **Harvard College**, the oldest higher learning institution in the U.S.
- 1637 **Pequot War** takes place, an early major armed conflict between an indigenous tribe and New England colonists and their native alliances

- 1638 **Ann Hutchinson** is banished from Massachusetts Bay Colony for challenging Puritan beliefs in the course of **Antinomian Controversy**
- 1654 First **Jewish presence** in today's United States, as twenty-three Dutch Jews, having fled from Recife in colonial Brazil, set foot on New Amsterdam
- 1664 In the context of **Anglo-Dutch Wars**, Peter Stuyvesant surrenders New Amsterdam, then renamed **New York**, to English troops, which demonstrates growing dominance of British Crown in the Middle Colonies
- 1675–78 **King Philip's War**, the deadliest conflict in colonial American history, largely destroys power of indigenous populations
- 1681 William Penn founds **Pennsylvania**, one of the largest as well as religiously, socio-culturally, linguistically, and ethno-racially most diverse of the original **Thirteen Colonies**
- 1692 **Salem witchcraft trials** in early Massachusetts typify colonial social climate of theological dispute and religious enthusiasm, at times hysteria
- 1728 Death of **Cotton Mather** (*1663) ends the spiritual authority of the Mather dynasty in colonial Massachusetts – with his grandfather Richard Mather (1596–1669) and his father Increase Mather (1639–1723) preceding him as towering clergymen – and symbolically marks the passing of classic **New England Puritanism**
- 1731 **Benjamin Franklin** founds Library Company of Philadelphia – the first public library in the colonies promoting democratic, free education – while emerging as one of the most momentous public intellectuals in U.S. history
- 1743 Franklin founds **American Philosophical Society**, a key institution to spread **modern Enlightenment thought** in the New World, based on principles of science-oriented reason, religious tolerance, socio-economic liberalism, and political republicanism, thus secularizing Puritan traditions according to the doctrine of **Deism**
- 1730s–50s **Great Awakening**; a revivalist reaction movement against Enlightenment worldview, marking rise of Anglo-American Protestant evangelicalism
- 1756–63 **French and Indian War**; a decisive battle for imperial supremacy amongst European powers in whose North American phase English troops defeat the French in Quebec in 1759, cementing a new form of **Anglo-American communal identity**
- 1763 **Treaty of Paris** confirms England's imperial dominance in North America, reserving the lands between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River to the Indian inhabitants, thus restricting the colonists' westward expansion
- 1764–73 A series of **tax laws and coercive measures**, leading to **increasing tension with American colonists**, are passed by British Parliament to raise revenues from the Thirteen Colonies, among them Sugar Act (1764), Stamp Act (1765), Quartering Act (1765), Townshend Duties (1767–68), and Tea Act (1773)
- 1773 **Boston Tea Party**; some fifty men, naming themselves "sons of liberty" and dressing up as Indians, board British merchant ships and dump 342 chests of tea into the harbor
- 1775–83 **American Revolutionary War**; after military collisions ensue between British army and Massachusetts militias in the battles of Lexington and Concord, Second Continental Congress convenes in Philadelphia with delegates from the Thirteen Colonies, appointing **George Washington** Commander-in-Chief to lead the newly created Continental Army in the war for independence
- 1776 On July 4 Congress adopts the **Declaration of Independence**, pronouncing the Thirteen Colonies sovereign states no longer under British rule
- 1783 In the **Treaty of Paris**, British Crown recognizes American independence

- 1789 After a public and national ratification debate lasting for almost two years, **U.S. Constitution** becomes effective on March 4, and **George Washington** is inaugurated as the Early Republic's first president on April 30; meanwhile, outbreak of the **French Revolution** in Europe deeply polarizes public opinion and leads to the **First Party System** as a model for American politics: **Alexander Hamilton** creates first political party in U.S. history, the conservative, centralist, anti-revolutionary Federalist Party based in New England, challenged in 1792 by **Thomas Jefferson's** foundation of the egalitarian, republicanist, pro-revolutionary Democratic-Republican Party with strongholds in the South and the Western frontier (*not to be confused with today's either Democratic or Republican Party*)
- 1791 **United States Bill of Rights**, consisting of ten Amendments that guarantee specific personal rights and freedoms, is added to the Constitution
- 1803 **Louisiana Purchase**; for \$15 million, France sells to the United States Louisiana territory, a vast stretch of land west of the Mississippi, which nearly doubles the size of the country and sets forth **Lewis and Clark Expedition** to explore the new territory
- 1812–15 **War of 1812**; in the context of ongoing conflict between France, Britain, and their respective allies in Europe as well as overseas, American international trade policies become disrupted, so that U.S. Congress declares "second war of independence" against Great Britain, fostering a renewed sense of unity and nationalistic pride
- 1819 Spain cedes Florida to the United States (**Adams-Onís Treaty**)
- 1820s–30s **Market Revolution**; four interlocked socio-economic developments – rapid population growth, expansion of transportation infrastructure, commerce and export in agriculture, and early industrialization – condition the Union's radical transformation from an agrarian to a capitalist society
- 1820 **Missouri Compromise**, a federal legislation that reflects increased tensions over slavery, admits Missouri as slave state and Maine as free state to the Union
- 1823 At a defining moment for U.S. foreign policy to come, President James Monroe formulates **Monroe Doctrine** that distinguishes global spheres of influence and warns European powers against colonial ventures in the Western hemisphere, thus initiating a patriotic so-called "era of good feeling" (*see also 1898, "Roosevelt Corollary," below*)
- 1828 In the context of voting reforms, and a socially and regionally broadened electorate, **Democratic Party** is founded and candidate Andrew Jackson elected president, which heralds an era of popular grassroots **Jacksonian democracy** (limited to male European Americans and encouraging further westward expansion of White population)
- 1830 Congress passes **Indian Removal Act**, President Jackson's initiative to forcibly relocate the five Native American nations of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole west of the Mississippi
- 1830s As lynchings spread out across the South, an **abolitionist movement** forms, with an **Underground Railroad** evolving, a network of safe houses to aid slaves escaping North, often to Canada; **Nat Turner** leading a slave rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia (1831); **William Lloyd Garrison** starting the journal *The Liberator* (1831) that demands immediate emancipation of slaves; the **American Antislavery Society** being founded (1833); and fugitive slave **Frederick Douglass** emerging as one of the movement's national leaders (1838)
- 1830s–50s Further social movements, religious revivals, and utopian ventures herald an "**age of reform**," focusing on issues such as antislavery, women's and workers' rights, public

- education, prison and hospital reform, temperance and celibacy, pacifism and civil disobedience, proto-environmentalism, philosophical transcendentalism, communitarian experimentation, missionary millennialism
- 1833 The conservative, protectionist **Whig Party**, led by Henry Clay and propagating economic growth linked to moral progress, is formed in opposition to the Democratic Party, which leads to **Second Party System**
- 1838 At a height of genocidal removal politics, remaining Cherokee are forced by federal troops from their ancestral territory onto **Trail or Tears**, leading to Oklahoma land
- 1840s–50s More than four million **migrants** arrive in the United States, many from Germany and especially Ireland (in the context of the Great Famine, 1845–49)
- 1845 **Texas Annexation**: having declared independence from Mexico in 1836, Texas is admitted to the United States; in an influential article, political writer John L. O’Sullivan justifies ongoing **territorial expansion** of the Union as “the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government”; **Manifest Destiny** becomes an ideological cornerstone of **American exceptionalism**, merging Anglo-Protestant nationalism with a widespread belief in technological progress and in a divine sense of mission (*see also 1893, “frontier thesis,” below*)
- 1846 By agreement with Great Britain, United States acquires present-day states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho (**Oregon Treaty**), thus becoming a Pacific power
- 1846–48 **Mexican-American War**; as Mexico capitulates, the United States acquires land comprising all or large parts of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming (**Mexican Cession** codified in **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**)
- 1848 At the **Seneca Falls Convention**, a landmark assembly launching women’s rights movement in the U.S., Elizabeth Cady Stanton reads **Declaration of Sentiments**, a crucial text in feminist history based on Declaration of Independence; Stanton will later become first president of the **National Woman Suffrage Association** (1869)
- 1848–49 **California Gold Rush** dramatically increases California’s population, who ask admission into the Union yet outlaw slavery, which intensifies the key national controversy
- 1850 **Compromise of 1850**, a series of measures intended to defuse the slavery dispute, admits California as a free state yet includes the **Fugitive Slave Act** that obliges free states to return escaped slaves to slaveholders, a chief victory for the pro-slavery South
- 1854 **Kansas-Nebraska Act** repeals the Missouri Compromise’s partial ban on slavery and empowers White voting residents of respective territory to decide over slavery (“popular sovereignty”); in response, as Whig Party is disintegrating, **Republican Party** is formed in opposition to slavery, which leads to **Third Party System**
- 1857 Supreme Court **Dred Scott** decision denies citizenship to African Americans
- 1861 **Abraham Lincoln** is inaugurated as first Republican president, opposing extension of slavery, which causes secession of Southern states from the Union and founding of the **Confederate States of America**, unrecognized by Lincoln
- 1861–65 **American Civil War**; fought initially to subdue secession and save the Union, its ultimate goal gradually becomes universal end of slavery
- 1863 Lincoln’s **Emancipation Proclamation** (Jan. 1) declares 3.5 million enslaved African Americans in Confederate-controlled areas free; **Battle of Gettysburg** (July 1–3), with the Union’s decisive victory, becomes war’s turning point

- 1865–77 **Reconstruction Era**, marked by profound socio-political ambivalence with the advent of both civil rights and more deathly terror for African Americans in particular; e.g., **Thirteenth Amendment** (1865) constitutionally ends slavery on entire U.S. territory; Lincoln is **assassinated** by Confederate sympathizer (1865); **Juneteenth** (June 19, 1865) is celebrated when freedom for slaves is announced in Texas, the last Confederate state with institutional slavery; six former Confederate officers found the White supremacist **Ku Klux Klan** (1865); after introduction of “black codes” in Southern states’ legislatures, which restrict rights for African Americans and reintroduce slavery-like labor rules, **Fourteenth Amendment** (1865) guarantees citizenship and equal rights to all persons born or naturalized in the U.S. (except Native Americans); **Fifteenth Amendment** (1870) forbids the denial of any male citizen’s voting right because of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude” (retaining women’s disenfranchisement); as a major **economic crisis** hits the nation (1873) and the Republican Party loses popular support, federal military rule is removed from the South (1876), where conservative elites and paramilitary groups restore **racial segregation**
- 1867 United States purchases **Alaska** from Russia
- 1869 North America’s **first transcontinental railroad** is completed, epitomizing the colossal **technological, industrial, and socio-economic transformation** of the day; workforce is largely composed of Chinese laborers (especially in the West), with a quarter of a million migrants arriving from China, increasingly met with violent **anti-Asian racism**
- 1870s–90s A series of **assimilationist policies and practices**, designed to eradicate Native American nations as distinct political entities, is enacted; e.g., **Indian Appropriation Act** (1871) ends federal recognition of sovereign tribes and **Dawes Act** (1887) fragments Native American reservations, making land free for non-Indians to occupy; missionary **boarding schools** separate the young from their tribal lands and cultures; indigenous resistance includes the Sioux and Cheyenne victory over LtCol Custer’s regiment in the **Battle of Little Bighorn** (1876), but is frequently subdued by brutal force
- 1880s–1920s More than **20 million migrants** arrive in the United States, over-proportionately from **Southern and Eastern Europe** (the latter mostly Jews fleeing tsarist Russia); around the same time, after the turn of the century (especially during World War I), intercontinental **Great Migration** takes place, the exodus of nearly two million **African Americans** who leave rural Southern areas; both migrant cohorts settle mainly in Midwestern and Northeastern cities like Chicago, Pennsylvania, and New York, where “**melting-pot**” metaphor becomes popularized; explosive growth of city population in conjunction with ongoing industrialization, big-business corporate ownership, and intensely competitive politics and corruption brings distinctive **urban phenomena** such as hard factory and sweatshop work, crowded tenement housing under poor and unsanitary conditions, a vital popular culture and mass entertainment scene (dance halls, vaudeville shows, motion pictures, book clubs especially for middle-class women), upper-class philanthropy and leisure; the latest (Marxist-oriented) political imports from Europe lead to labor union movement, often ruthlessly suppressed by political and capital elites; **Darwin’s** influential theory of natural selection becomes paradigm to rationalize the competitive new order; the closing nineteenth century thus cements socio-political contradictions (power accumulation and material prosperity on one hand; downward mobility, ethno-racial, gender, and class division on the other) captured in Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner’s catchphrase of the “**gilded age**” (*see also 1911, “Progressive Era,” below*)
- 1881 **Tuskegee Institute** founded in Alabama, a leading African American educational and cultural center in the South
- 1882 **Chinese Exclusion Act** universally bars “any Chinese laborer” from entering the U.S.

- 1886 **Statue of Liberty** dedicated; sonnet “The New Colossus” by Sephardic German-Jewish poet Emma Lazarus is cast in bronze and placed at statue’s pedestal in 1903
- 1890 **Wounded Knee Massacre**; nearly 300 Lakota people are killed by federal troops at Wounded Knee Creek, Pine Ridge Reservation/South Dakota, in the context of **Ghost Dance War** (*see also 1973, “American Indian Movement,” below*)
- 1892 **Ellis Island Immigration Station** opens in New York Harbor and becomes place of entry for 12 million arrivals (mainly from Europe) until its closing in 1954
- 1893 Historian Frederick Jackson Turner formulates “**frontier thesis**” whose focus on the significance of territorial expansion becomes one of the most powerful ideas in U.S. history: the society of the “New World” is said to be constantly challenged and regenerated as the “primitive” wilderness of the frontier is encountered and then cultivated, pushed ever-further westward, “away from the influence of Europe” so that “American social development [is] continually beginning over again on the frontier” – an exceptionalist vision of progress, freedom, and democratic individualism (*see also 1845, “Manifest Destiny,” above*)
- 1896 Supreme Court **Plessy v. Ferguson** decision upholds post-Reconstruction system of White supremacy, officially acknowledging local segregationist **Jim Crow Laws** (and their so-called “separate-but-equal” codification); lynching becomes a common tool and public spectacle showcasing Black subjugation in the South
- 1898 **U.S. Empire** becomes consolidated in Americas, rivalling European powers’ imperial expansion in Africa and Asia, and opening access to new markets: in the context of **Spanish-American War**, former Spanish colonies of Puerto Rico, Guam, and Philippine Islands are ceded and Cuba becomes U.S. protectorate; Hawaii is annexed; aftereffects include diverse domestic and geopolitical developments like foundation of **American Anti-Imperialist League** (1898), **Philippine-American War** (1899–1902), or “**Roosevelt Corollary**” to Monroe Doctrine (1904) which propagates U.S. economic and military intervention in Latin American countries with purported “chronic wrongdoing” (followed by three decades of U.S. invasions and occupations in the region to protect strategic interests) (*see also 1823, “Monroe Doctrine,” above*)
- 1903 **Henry Ford** founds Ford Motor Company, which will turn **automobile manufacturing** into mass production system, fundamentally reshaping the nation’s industry, urban and overland topography, and mobility and consumer patterns
- 1909 **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People** (NAACP) is founded in the context of rampant anti-Black violence, among others by towering African American intellectual **W. E. B. Du Bois**
- 1910 **Angel Island Immigration Station** opens in San Francisco Bay as an interrogation and detention center to process more than half a million arrivals (mainly from Asia) until its closing in 1940
- 1911 **Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire** in New York City causes death of 146 garment workers (mostly recent migrant women and girls); the deadliest industrial disaster in the city’s history, it constitutes a central event in the nation’s **Progressive Era** (roughly the twentieth century’s first third), bringing forth reformist debates over unregulated corporate power and municipal corruption, taxation, child labor, health and safety conditions in factories as well as in poor and migrant neighborhoods (“slum districts”), pollution and natural-resource conservation, voting and women’s rights, temperance, anti-prostitution, but also sexual freedom (influenced by **Sigmund Freud**’s analysis of the individual trapped in a repressive modernity) and toleration of sexual minorities, especially gay culture; as a belief in ethnic and racial hierarchy is widely upheld, paired with Social

Darwinist arguments about human evolution and heredity of physical and moral defects, a pseudo-scientific and racist **eugenics movement** forms part of the reform dynamic (*see also 1880s–1920, “gilded age,” above*)

- 1914 **Panama Canal** is opened, having largely been built and controlled by United States, revolutionizing international trade through its connection of Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, thus symbolizing the nation’s emergence as a world power
- 1914–18 **World War I**; after proclaimed neutrality for almost three years, U.S. enters the war in 1917 on the side of France, Britain, and Italy (just as Bolshevik Revolution ends Russian participation), against Germany and Central Powers; entire population and economy becomes mobilized to produce soldiers and supplies, with large numbers of women recruited for jobs vacated by men for the first time in U.S. history as well as African (and Native) Americans serving in the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), experiencing less segregated social norms in France in particular; in tandem with the Bolshevik internationalist (Marxist-Leninist) rise, and against the backdrop of a given phase of American hyper-patriotism, this leads to postwar reformist achievements yet also a rekindled climate of nativist reaction and anti-radical hysteria (underscoring the nation’s deep cultural divisions, and captured in the myth of the “Roaring Twenties”)
- 1919 **Red Summer**; in the postwar context of a dramatically transformed socio-economic landscape – after the African American Great Migration as well as with tens of thousands of Black veterans returning home and resisting re-subjugation, all the while suspect of communist influence –, thousands of African Americans are injured, murdered, or have to flee their homes in race riots and white supremacist terror in more than two dozen cities across the U.S., which is responded by both Black armed resistance and peaceful protest organized by James Weldon Johnson and the NAACP (with a landmark antecedent Silent Parade in New York City in 1917, with more than 10,000 African Americans marching down Fifth Avenue in protest of East St. Louis Riots)
- 1919–20 **First Red Scare**; as labor unrest, trade unionism, the rise of the Communist Party USA, and a series of anarchist bombings disrupt the domestic social order, the threat of “foreign infiltration” is further invoked; thousands of “un-American” radicals are arrested and hundreds of suspected resident aliens deported, with minimal legal process
- 1920 **Nineteenth Amendment** recognizes the right of women to vote
- 1920–27 **Sacco-Vanzetti trial**; after a murder during a robbery near Boston, avowed anarchists from Italy, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, are tried and sentenced to death; the case draws repeated appeals and worldwide attention, with numerous intellectuals protesting in the convicts’ defense (at times being jailed for it), yet Sacco and Vanzetti are ultimately electrocuted
- 1920–33 **Prohibition**; constitutional ban illegalizes the manufacture, transport, and sale of alcohol (going into effect through Eighteenth Amendment, being repealed again by Twenty-first Amendment)
- 1924 Exclusionist **Johnson-Reed Act** sets quotas on number of accepted immigrants, benefitting Northwest Europeans, limiting Southern and Eastern Europeans, banning Asians (*see also 1965, “Immigration Act of 1965,” below*)
- 1925 **Alain Locke** publishes *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, a groundbreaking collection of critical essays, fiction, and poetry by and about African American art and literature; the anthology becomes widely recognized as manifesto of the **Harlem Renaissance**, a distinctly African American artistic movement of the 1920s and ’30s, steeped in African folk culture and oral traditions as well as their musical transplantations in blues and Jazz, forming a unique artistic revival centered in Harlem, New York City

- 1926 **Ernest Hemingway** publishes *The Sun Also Rises*, which features the epigraph, “You are all a lost generation,” ascribed to **Gertrude Stein**; the term **Lost Generation** comes to denote a group of formative American expatriate writers settling in Paris during the 1920s, where they seek a cultural modernity, literary originality, and international artistic exchange after having lived through the war and its aftermath in disillusionment
- 1929 **Stock market crashes**, leading to major social and labor unrest, a 25 percent unemployment rate, and start of a worldwide **Great Depression** (which in the U.S. does not fully end until industrial recovery during World War II)
- 1932 **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** elected president; his series of **New Deal** liberal reforms – Social Security and welfare programs like unemployment insurance, old-age pension, cultural and public work projects, financial regulation – mark a watershed in American political history
- 1939–45 **World War II**; U.S. gets involved after Japanese warplanes attack American fleet at **Pearl Harbor** in Hawaii, joining Allies (UK, Soviet Union, China, France, and smaller forces) and declaring war on Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, Japan) in Dec. 1941; after German surrender in May 1945, **Pacific War** persists and U.S. drops two **atomic bombs** on **Hiroshima** and **Nagasaki** in Aug. 1945, with Japan surrendering; anti-Japanese propaganda and racism pervade the era, and President Roosevelt orders **internment of 120,000 Japanese Americans** in concentration camps in 1942; war’s aftermath **ends Depression**, as mobilization has unified the country politically, revitalized the industry, and re-opened occupations (not least for women entering the workforce in unprecedented numbers); with major powers in Europe and the Soviet Union economically devastated at the same time, U.S. emerges supreme as the world’s **superpower**
- 1944–56 **G.I. Bill** profoundly transforms U.S. educational and vocational landscape, providing a range of benefits to returning war veterans in the context of college tuition, professional training, and business start-ups; for the first time structurally profiting men from migrant, poor, and working-class backgrounds (all the while failing to challenge Jim Crow discrimination), the program ultimately sustains 7.8 million veterans
- Post-1945 **Cold War** sets off; Joseph Stalin condemns policy of “**Western imperialism**” in a much-noted speech in early 1946; on invitation by President Harry S. Truman, Winston Churchill responds soon after with a speech that denounces Soviet “**Iron Curtain**” lowered across Europe; ideological framework is fostered by U.S. “**Containment**” **Doctrine** that seeks so contain Soviet influence and sets the stage for massive military and increasingly nuclear buildup (1947); economically, **Marshall Plan** promotes (Western) European postwar recovery and in effect reduces Soviet advances (1948); **Germany** emerges as a central site (and West Germany as a major beneficent of Marshall Plan aid), with the formation of the Federal Republic pushed by Western Allies, and the resultant foundation and Eastern Bloc-integration of the German Democratic Republic (1949); U.S.-led military alliance **NATO** (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is formed (1949), with Asian equivalent **SEATO** (South Asian Treaty Organization) succeeding (1954), and Americas-based anti-communist **Rio Treaty** already in force (since 1947)
- 1950 Senator **Joseph McCarthy** delivers “**Enemies from Within**” speech, claiming knowledge of more than 200 “communists within our government”; McCarthy becomes omnipresent public figure in forthcoming years of **Second Red Scare** that leads to the blacklisting of numerous politicians, journalists, intellectuals, and entertainers
- 1950–53 **Korean War**; Korea – demarcated into a Northern (Soviet) and a Southern (American) sphere of influence since former occupant Japan’s defeat in 1945 – becomes site of geostrategic importance when Northern dictator Kim Il-sung sends communist troops southward, and U.S. intervenes; without a peace treaty formally ending the war, Korea remains divided across a demilitarized zone implemented by armistice agreement

- 1951 Completion of first **Levittown** housing development epitomizes postwar **suburbia** phenomenon: in an era of unparalleled **economic boom**, millions of White, upwardly mobile Americans leave the cities, partly due to racial anxiety and fear of metropolitan decay, forging a distinctive nuclear family ideal and ideology of social conformity in the suburbs; craving the “good life,” and creating a **new consumerist middle class**, this generation makes heavy use of facilitated travel and vacation (due to accelerated automobile construction and highway expansion), rise of motel chains and fast-food franchises, introduction of credit cards, and further spread of mass media and popular culture (most notably television); **American capitalism** obtains global dominance, even as huge domestic income gaps, extensive poverty, and segregation persist
- 1954 Supreme Court **Brown v. Board of Education** decision declares segregated schools unconstitutional
- 1957 Group of nine African American students, the **Little Rock Nine**, are enrolled in Little Rock Central High School, Little Rock, Arkansas, which causes racist rioting and clashes with “massive resistance” campaign launched by conservative Democrats in the South; for the first time since Reconstruction, federal troops are deployed (by President Dwight D. Eisenhower) to settle local social justice issue; legally, **Civil Rights Act of 1957** is designed to henceforth protect African American enfranchisement federally
- 1960 **Woolworth lunch counter sit-in** takes place in Greensboro, North Carolina, a defining catalyst of **Civil Rights Movement**; organizers are the **Greensboro Four**, four African American students inspired by **Martin Luther King’s** practice of non-violent protest
- 1962 **Cuban Missile Crisis**; after revolutionary leader Fidel Castro overthrows pro-U.S. Cuban government, and American counter-coup fails, Soviet General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev installs nuclear missiles in Cuba, targeting United States; with a nuclear war looming, President John F. Kennedy and Khrushchev broker diplomatic solution, including future arms control and creation of direct Moscow-Washington Hotline
- 1963 During **March on Washington**, which unites civil rights, labor, and religious organizations, Martin Luther King delivers historic “**I Have a Dream**” speech before audience of 250,000; march is partly organized to demonstrate support for civil rights legislation proposed by President Kennedy, who is assassinated three months later
- 1965 **Immigration Act of 1965** ends discriminatory quota system, which substantially reshapes migration patterns, with millions of new arrivals coming from Latin America, Asia, and gradually Africa (rather than mainly from Europe and Canada) (*see also 1924, “Johnson-Reed Act,” above*)
- 1965–73 **Vietnam War**; with France having left its former colony Vietnam, U.S. assumes strategic, financial, and military support of South Vietnamese state that is competing against communist-led Northern government and engaged in guerilla fight against Southern-based Viet Cong; embracing the geopolitical “domino theory,” which posits that communism will spread throughout the region if Vietnam falls, Presidents Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson justify U.S. military intervention and send ever more troops into gradually escalating war; as stability cannot be secured, troop morale deteriorates, and American war crimes like **My Lai Massacre** (1968) ensue, massive **anti-war movement** forms in United States and President Richard Nixon, originally an advocate of intervention, withdraws all troops
- 1966 **National Organization for Women** (NOW) is founded in the context of women’s rights milestones like **Betty Friedan’s** seminal publication, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), or passing of **Civil Rights Act of 1964** (including prohibition of sexual discrimination), altogether sparking **second-wave feminist movement**

- 1969 **Stonewall Riots** ensue after increasingly violent police raids in Greenwich Village, New York City, at the Stonewall Inn, marking the beginning of **gay liberation movement**; at **Woodstock Rock Festival**, New York State, more than 400,000 members of the **hippie and counterculture movement** celebrate peace, love, and drug experience
- 1970 First **Earth Day** is observed across the United States by millions, substantiating a long tradition of American environmental awareness and activism, re-energized by **Rachel Carson's** ecocritical landmark work, *Silent Spring* (1962); President Nixon creates **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**
- 1973 Members of **American India Movement (AIM)** occupy symbolic site of Wounded Knee, Pine Ridge Reservation/South Dakota, protesting federal policies related to Native Americans (*see also 1890, "Wounded Knee Massacre," above*); U.S.-supported coup in **Chile** overthrows democratically elected leftist government of **Salvador Allende** and helps military dictator Augusto Pinochet rise to power; Arab states halt oil export to U.S., opposing American support of Israel during Yom Kippur War (**oil crisis**)
- 1974 In the context of **Watergate Scandal** – during which White House involvement in illegal activity is revealed, notably wiretapping of the Democratic Party's headquarters (Watergate Office Building) and cover-up attempts – President Nixon resigns
- 1979 **Iran hostage crisis**: after Iranian Revolution, which fundamentally re-designs Iran-United States relations and American geostrategic activity in the region, militant Iranian students seize U.S. Embassy in Tehran and take hostage some 60 U.S. diplomats and citizens for 444 days
- 1981 **AIDS** is officially identified in the United States
- 1983 President **Ronald Reagan**, while pursuing a domestic rollback program of anti-government conservatism and free-market deregulation, delivers "**Evil Empire**" speech, stylizing Cold War conflict as an epic battle between good and evil; atomic **arms race** approaches escalation, which fuels U.S. and global **anti-nuclear movement**, while Reagan simultaneously develops political friendship with Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and works toward **ending of Cold War** (which follows in the wake of Soviet collapse in 1989)
- 1991 Coalition forces from 35 nations, under leadership of United States and assembled by President George H. W. Bush, start **Gulf War** against Iraq as response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait
- 1993 President Bill Clinton signs **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)** into law, creating a trilateral trade bloc consisting of Mexico, United States, and Canada
- 1998 **Impeachment of President Clinton** occurs in the wake of Clinton-Lewinsky scandal
- 2000 **George W. Bush** wins presidential elections against Vice President Al Gore, the first victorious candidate losing the popular vote since 1888, while required Florida recount is controversially short-circuited by Supreme Court
- 2001 **9/11 terrorist attacks** on World Trade Center, Pentagon, and supposedly White House are conducted by Al Qaeda members in hijacked U.S. passenger aircraft, killing 3,000 and prompting President Bush to declare "**war on terror**"; counterterrorist **Operation Enduring Freedom** starts with U.S.-led combat mission in **Afghanistan** (Oct. 7), with troops remaining for nearly 20 years until **Fall of Kabul** and Taliban return to power on Aug. 15, 2021
- 2003 After Bush administration falsely link Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein to 9/11 and insist on Iraqi buildup of weapons of mass destruction (WMD; without proof), **U.S.-led coalition invades Iraq**, plunging country into protracted civil war and instability

- 2004 Human rights violations and war crimes committed by U.S. Army and CIA members come to public attention after CBS News publishes photographs of **Abu Ghraib** prison, Iraq; criticism equally targets American torture practices at **Guantanamo Bay** detention camp, Cuba
- 2009 Inauguration of President **Barack Obama**, first Black president in U.S. history
- 2013 **#BlackLivesMatter movement** forms after killer of African American teenager Trayvon Martin is acquitted
- 2021 Inauguration of **Kamala Harris**, first female, first African American, and first Asian American Vice President in U.S. history

Recommended reading

Boyer, Paul S. *American History: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.

Heideking, Jürgen, Christof Mauch, and Anke Ortlepp. *Geschichte der USA*. 7th ed. Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2020.

Spickard, Paul. *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity*. New York: Routledge, 2007.