

# THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

## FROM COLUMBUS...

In 1492 Christopher Columbus discovered the New World, but the continent takes its name from Amerigo Vespucci, an Italian explorer who sailed from Portugal and reached the coasts of South America in 1501.

In the 16th century Spain and Portugal began to colonise South America while England, France and Holland colonised the North.

Manhattan (from the Indian name Mana – Hatin, meaning hilly island), was bought by a Dutchman in 1626 for £24 and named the place New Amsterdam. The English took it in 1664 and renamed it New York.

## ... TO THE PILGRIM FATHERS

In **1620** a group of English Puritans, the Pilgrim Fathers, left Plymouth on the Mayflower to start a new life because their religion was forbidden in England. They landed (*sbarcare*) in Massachusetts.

The Indians were friendly and helped them to grow plants. When they heard that the Indians held a ceremony every year at harvest time to thank nature for the food, the Puritans decided to make it a special feast called **Thanksgiving**.

Until 1863 celebrations were limited to a few states in the east, but these days this festivity is now celebrated in every state and takes place on the fourth Thursday of November.

People cook large dinners with stuffed (*ripieno*) turkey and pumpkin pie.

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THE FAMOUS CUSTOM MADE  
PLYMOUTH ROCK \$3 PANTS.

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## INDEPENDENCE WAR

After about 150 years, the colonies decided they wanted to become independent from Britain. They **didn't need to import products** any more and **Britain imposed heavy taxes** that the colonists didn't accept to pay. In **1773** the British placed a new tax on tea. In answer, some angry Bostonians threw a cargo of tea in Boston harbour. This event is known as the **Boston Tea Party** and marked the beginning of the Independence war.

The colonies formed an army, the Continental Army, led by George Washington. The king of England, George III, declared the colonists as rebels. On **July 4th 1776 the Declaration of Independence was approved** by the Continental Congress. The war broke out and lasted several years, until America formed an alliance with France and defeated the British.

United States were formed and **George Washington** became the President. In **1787** the Constitution was written and signed by the thirteen states and in **1791 the Bill of Rights was passed**, giving more freedom to the people – freedom of speech, press, religion, etc.

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## THE STATUE OF LIBERTY

Next to the flag, the **Statue of Liberty** is America's most famous symbol for freedom. It's in Hudson Bay, located on Liberty Island in New York Harbour, and was a gift from the people of France to the people of the United States.

The construction of the Statue began in France in the year **1875**, by sculptor August Bartholdi, and it stood in Paris until it was dismantled in early 1885. The Statue of Liberty was **dedicated on October 28, 1886**. The Statue of Liberty is the most visited tourist attraction in New York City.

The statue is of a woman holding a lit flame, and is made of a sheeting of pure copper, hung on a framework of steel with the exception of the flame of the torch, which is coated in gold leaf. In the other hand the statue holds a tablet with the inscription of the date of the Independence Day. The statue is 305 feet (92.96 m) tall.



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## EXPANSION AND THE GOLD RUSH

In the 19th century the Europeans began to move west looking for new territory. The nation bought many areas from different countries: an enormous area **from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico** from France, **Florida** from Spain, **Alaska** from Russia and other areas from Britain. After a war with Mexico, they also took over **California and New Mexico**.

The pioneers took possession of the land where the Indians were living and they were forced to leave or fight. The worst period for the Indians was the Gold Rush: in **1849** gold was discovered in California and thousands of people rushed hoping to make their fortune. The Indians were defeated and pushed into reservations.

## THE CIVIL WAR

There was a big difference between the northern and the southern states: in the north slavery was abolished (*la schiavitù fu abolita*) in the first years of the 19th century, but the economy in the south still depended on slaves working in the plantations.

**Six states left the Union in 1860** when President Abraham Lincoln announced his anti-slavery policy. Other states followed and they all formed the Confederate States of America. This started the American Civil War.

The war lasted four years and finished in **1864**.

Amendments were made to the Constitution abolishing slavery and giving equal rights to the black population, but a long time passed before things really changed in the south. Discrimination continued and the Southern States never really accepted equality between all the people.



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## RACISM: M.L. KING'S DREAM

At the end of the American Civil War, slavery was abolished in all the states of the USA. Legally the slaves were free and equal to white people but many people in the southern states of America did not agree. The Ku Klux Klan, a white terrorist group, threatened and even murdered the blacks and the white people who tried to help them.

In the 1950s the blacks were excluded from many basic forms of everyday life and their black kids couldn't go to the same schools as the white. For this reason on September 3rd, 1957 9 black students tried to enter Little Rock Central High School but the Arkansas state governor's order stopped them. On September 20th a judge said that they could enter the school, a crowd of about a thousand people became so furious that the students had to leave the building. On the 25th President Eisenhower sent soldiers to the school so the students could return to Little Rock.

**Martin Luther King jr.** was born in 1929. He attended segregated public schools in Georgia and then went to Boston university. In Boston he also married and started a family. In 1954 he became a pastor in the Baptist Church in Montgomery in Alabama. He worked to get civil rights for black people and he was a member of the National Association for Advancement of Colored People.

Civil rights activist **Rosa Parks** became famous and popular for her refusal to surrender her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery bus started a city-wide boycott. **M.L. King** led the bus boycott, the first great black "non" violent demonstration in the united States.

On December 1, 1955, after a long day's work, Rosa Parks boarded the bus for home. She took a seat in the first of several rows designated for "colored" passengers. Montgomery bus drivers had adopted the custom of requiring black passengers to give up their seats to white passengers. If the black passenger protested, the bus driver could call the police.

When the bus began to fill with white passengers, the driver stopped the bus and asked four black passengers to give up their seats. Rosa refused and the police arrested her.

On the evening that Rosa Parks was arrested, the National Association for Advancement of Colored People began forming plans to organize a boycott of Montgomery's city buses.

Rosa was found guilty and was fined but the Montgomery Bus Boycott was a huge success.

Although she had become a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement, Rosa Parks lost her job and her husband was fired. They eventually had to leave Montgomery and moved to Detroit. During the boycott, King was arrested and his home was bombed.

In 1956, the Supreme Court of the United States declared segregation on buses unconstitutional and blacks and white could sit buses are equals.

On **August 28, 1963** he organized the peaceful **march on Washington**, DC when 250,000 people listened to his famous speech ***I Have a Dream***. In this speech he talked about his hopes for the future when blacks and whites could be brothers. In the same year he was named "Man of the Year" by Time magazine and became not only the symbolic leader, whereas in 1968 he won the Nobel Prize for Peace.

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## THE USA IN WORLD WAR II

The United States did not want to take part in World War I but in 1917 they decided to help France and England against Germany. After the war, the States went through a period of great prosperity.

The Wall Street Crash, in 1929, caused the start of the Great Depression which brought unemployment (*disoccupazione*) and extreme poverty which lasted ten years. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his *New Deal* solved the nation's economy.

The States important participation in World War II confirmed the States as a world power. When war broke out in Europe, US President **Franklin Roosevelt** recognised that the conflict threatened US security, and looked for ways to help the European democracies without direct involvement in the war. This necessity increased in June 1940, when the Fall of France left Britain as the only democracy standing between Nazi Germany and America.

Churchill repeatedly attempted to convince Roosevelt to enter the war. Churchill did not have to wait long. The day after the bombing of the US Pacific fleet at **Pearl Harbor on 7th December 1941**, President Roosevelt declared war on Japan. Only one congressman opposed the declaration of war; the vote in the senate was unanimous. In **November 1942**, Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa, became the first US military offensive of the war in the West. Allied troops slowly cornered German forces in North Africa, who surrendered in May 1943.

By the beginning of 1943, the opening of a 'second front' was a crucial issue. Although both leaders recognised the urgent need to relieve the pressure on Russia on the Eastern Front, Churchill favoured an attack through Italy while Roosevelt pushed for an assault on France. The success of Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily launched in July 1943, allowed the Allies to invade the Italian mainland, capturing Rome on 4 June 1944.

After the **horrific bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki** in Japan, the war came to an end and the United Nations was established to create and keep peace in the world.



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## D-DAY

After the attack to Pearl Harbour President Roosevelt and Churchill decided to attack German forces in Caen: a French city. The attack was distributed on a 80 km beach and started on **4<sup>th</sup> June, 1944**.

In the 76 days of battles, allies lost 210.000 soldiers while Germans lost 200.000 soldiers and 200.000 prisoners. The D-Day is a code name to explain the day of an attack, this was for the one to the Nazi troupes in Caen, Normandy from Americans, English and Canadian.

Then other troupes arrived, but the attack was projected and realized by Americans and English.

When they arrived to Caen, they built an harbour to protect themselves form Germans after the attack because the Operation Overlord were series of battles in different days. After the D-Day, they got to their own harbour (one for each troupe) and prepared them for the next attack.

Many Americans died in the water for the weight of the arms or for the tanks that ran over them

After these series of attacks, Germans continued to suffer defeats and on **2nd** September 1945 the World War II finished also thanks the Operation Overlord.

Lots of souls were lost in this war but the biggest losses were in these battles.

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## THE ATTACK TO THE TWIN TOWERS

On **September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001** a series of terrorist attacks terrorized the USA. For the second time in USA history, after the attack in Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, the Americans were attacked in their nation directly.

**Two hijacked jetliners hit the Twin Towers**, which were the highest buildings in New York, and maybe the most famous and symbolical in the world. At about 9:58, the South tower collapsed, followed by the North tower at 10:28 while people were at work. Hundreds firemen and policemen sent to rescue WTC workers, were lost when the Twin Towers collapsed and 3 thousand people died.

A third hijacked airliner damaged the Pentagon outside Washington and another jetliner was directed to the White House to destroy it, but it crashed into a field in Pennsylvania, because some of the passengers realized where the plane was directed and fought with the hijackers.

The hijackers were members of **Al-Qaeda**, an organization of Muslim extremists formed by **Osama bin Laden** out of the militia of former Mujahedeen fighters who fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. In Arabic it means "the base".



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## ROOSEVELT'S AND BUSH'S SPEECHES

On December 7th, 1941, Pearl Harbor was a disaster for the USA as the Japanese destroyed America's Pacific fleet. Similarly, on September 11, 2001, New York City was surprisingly attacked and terrorism was once again introduced to the United States. Bush and Roosevelt addressed America regarding the attack. Both showed similar points, unity throughout the nation, responding to the attacks.

President Bush spoke with sympathy for the American losses and the hope to regain justice. His main point stated that every country has a decision of whether they are with the United States or with the terrorists. The President states, "From this day on, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime."

President Roosevelt had also addressed America with feelings of war and pay back to the enemy nations. With this, he pointed out that the United States would respond by bonding together with their ally countries and fight off those who are starting wars with America.

President Roosevelt's speech and President Bush's one are similar for some things they say:

The United States of America were suddenly and deliberately attacked;

The attacks were planned a long time before;

The attacks caused several damages and many citizens, soldiers and firemen died;

The victims were unaware of what was about to happen to them.