**A SHORT HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

*By Tim Lambert*

**PART ONE COLONIAL AMERICA**

**THE FIRST COLONIES IN NORTH AMERICA**

The first Europeans to establish colonies in North America were the Spanish. In 1526 a Spaniard called Lucas Vazquez de Ayllon attempted to found a colony in Carolina. (He also brought the first black slaves to North America). However the attempt failed. Many Spaniards died of disease and the survivors abandoned the colony.

In 1565 Pedro Menendez de Aviles founded a settlement at St Augustine, Florida, the first permanent European settlement in what is now the USA.

The first English attempt to colonize North America was made by a man named Sir Humphrey Gilbert. In 1578 Queen Elizabeth granted him permission to establish a colony there. In 1583 Gilbert sailed with a small fleet of ships to Newfoundland. However Gilbert soon abandoned the venture. Gilbert was lost on the voyage home.

However his half-brother, Walter Raleigh made another attempt to found a colony. In 1584 he sent two ships to explore the coast. They found what they thought was a suitable place for a colony. In January 1585 Queen Elizabeth the 'Virgin Queen' allowed him to call the place Virginia, after her. In April 1585 an expedition was sent led by Richard Grenville. They arrived in July 1585. Grenville left men on Roanoke Island then left for England to obtain more men and supplies. However while he was gone the colonists ran very short of supplies. In 1586 the colonists abandoned Virginia and returned to England.

In 1587 another attempt to found a colony was made by a man named John White. He led an expedition of men, women and children to Virginia. However White returned to England to seek more support for the colony. Because of a war between England and Spain he was unable to return to Virginia until 1590. When he did he found the colony deserted. The fate of the colonists is unknown.

**JAMESTOWN AND VIRGINIA**

The first attempts to found a colony in North America were made by gentlemen adventurers. Success came only when a group of men joined together and pooled their resources to found a colony. The Virginia Company was founded in 1606. They sent two expeditions to North America. Raleigh Gilbert (Sir Humphrey Gilbert's son) led one of them. They landed in Maine but soon gave up. They returned to England in 1609. The second expedition founded Jamestown on 14 May 1607.

More settlers arrived in 1609. However shortage of food, disease and conflict with the natives caused many deaths among the colonists. In 1610 the survivors were on the verge of leaving. They were dissuaded from doing so only when more ships from England arrived. In 1611 Sir Thomas Dale became the Governor of the colony. He introduced strict discipline with a code of laws called 'Laws, Divine, Moral and Martial'. Penalties for disobedience were severe.

In 1612 a man named John Rolfe began growing tobacco. In 1614 the first Virginian tobacco was sold in England. Exports of tobacco soon became the mainstay of the Virginian economy.

Gradually the colony expanded. In 1618 the Company offered 50 acres of land to anyone who could pay for the cost of their voyage across the Atlantic. If they could not pay they could become indentured servants. When they arrived they were not free. They had to work for the company for several years to pay back the cost of their passage. In 1619 19 black indentured servants arrived in Virginia.

Also in 1619 the first representative government in North America was created when the House of Burgesses met.

In 1624 the Virginia Company was dissolved and the Crown took over the colony. By 1660 the population of Virginia was 27,000. By 1710 it had risen to 78,000. However in 1699 the seat of government of Virginia was moved from Jamestown to Middle Plantation (Williamsburg). Afterwards Jamestown went into decline.

**THE PILGRIM FATHERS AND NEW ENGLAND**

Another English colony was founded 1620 by a group of people fleeing religious persecution. They disagreed with the teachings of the Church of England and wished to separate themselves from it not to reform it. However they did not actually call themselves 'pilgrims'. The colonists set out in a ship called the Mayflower and they arrived on 11 December 1620. Half of the colonists did not survive the first year in North America. The Natives who taught them how to grow crops saved the survivors. Another colony was founded at Salem in 1628.

The Massachusetts Bay Company was formed in 1629. From 1630 large numbers of settlers were transported to New England and its population swelled. Furthermore English colonists spread over the coast of North America. In 1634 people from Massachusetts founded the town of Wethersfield in Connecticut.

In 1636 a group of people left the Massachusetts Bay colony and settled on Rhode Island. The first settlement was at Providence.

Meanwhile a fishing settlement was founded in New Hampshire in 1623. In 1629 the area between the Merrimack River and the Piscataqua River was granted to a man named Mason. It was named New Hampshire. Portsmouth, New Hampshire was founded in 1630. Officially New Hampshire was part of Massachusetts until 1679.

Unlike the southern states, which were overwhelmingly agricultural New England developed a partly mercantile economy. Fishing was an important industry. Exports of timber and barrels were also important. There was also a ship building industry in New England.

[Life in 17th Century New England](http://www.localhistories.org/colonial.html)

The Europeans introduced many diseases to which the natives had little or no resistance. As a result many natives died and their number declined sharply. As the British colonies grew they inevitably came into conflict with the natives. The Pequot War was fought in 1637-1638 and it ended in the destruction of the Pequot tribe. Another desperate struggle took place in 1675-1676. the colonists heavy-handed treatment of the natives led to King Philip's War. King Philip was actually a native called Metacom and the war ended with his death. Although great damage was done on both sides the defeat of the natives effectively meant that the colonists now had mastery of New England.

In 1692 twenty people died as a result of the [Salem Witch Trials](http://www.localhistories.org/salem.html)

**NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY**

In 1624 the Dutch West India Company founded a colony called New Netherland. The first settlement was at Fort Orange (Albany). In 1638 Swedes formed a colony at Fort Christina (Wilmington). The Dutch captured this colony in 1655 and made it part of New Netherland. The British captured New Netherland in 1664 and renamed it New York in honor of the king's brother the Duke of York. King Charles II granted the colony to his brother. He in turn granted the land between the Delaware and the Hudson to two men, Lord John Berkeley (1607-1678) and Sir George Carteret (1615-1680). Carteret came from the island of Jersey in the English Channel and he named the area New Jersey after his home. In 1676 the colony was divided into East and West Jersey. Carteret took East Jersey. In 1681 his widow sold it to William Penn and 11 other Quakers. Penn hoped to turn this new colony into a haven of religious tolerance for Quakers and others. In 1682 the area now called Delaware was ceded to William Penn. In 1704 it was allowed its own assembly. However until the revolution Delaware and Pennsylvania shared a governor. Meanwhile East and West Jersey were reunited in 1702.

**MARYLAND**

Maryland was founded as a haven for Catholics (though by no means all the early colonists were Catholic, some were Protestant). A man named Cecil Calvert was granted territory north of the Potomac River. His brother Leonard led 200 settlers there to found a colony in 1634. It was named Maryland after the king's wife, Henrietta Maria. By 1640 there were about 500 people in Maryland. It soon became another tobacco growing colony.

**CAROLINA AND GEORGIA**

The Carolinas were settled after 1663 when Charles II granted them to 8 proprietors. Settlers came from islands in the Caribbean as well as from Virginia and New England. Charleston was founded in 1670. Carolina soon became a slave state. From the end of the 17th century many African slaves were transported to work on the plantations. In the early 18th century the African slave population in North America increased rapidly. In 1701 Carolina was divided into North and South Carolina.

Georgia was founded in 1732 when George II gave it a charter. It was named after him. The first settlement in Georgia was Savannah, which was founded in 1733.

**THE GREAT AWAKENING**

In the early 18th century there was a great religious revival in the North American colonies. (Later it was given the name 'The Great Awakening'). Leading figures in the revival were William Tennent 1673-1745, a Scottish-Presbyterian preacher, Jonathan Edwards 1703-1758. The English preacher George Whitefield 1714-1770 also visited the colonies and won many converts.

**CONFLICT WITH BRITAIN**

As the North American colonies grew tension with Britain was inevitable. The British felt that the colonies existed for the benefit of the mother country and this attitude was bound to cause resentment. As early as 1651 the British Parliament passed a navigation act. It stated that any goods grown or made outside Europe must be transported to England in English ships. Other Navigation Acts followed it. The 1660 Navigation Act stated that certain goods (cotton, indigo, sugar and tobacco) could only be exported from the colonies to England or to other colonies. It was followed by acts in 1670 and 1673. However the British made little attempt to enforce these acts and they were widely ignored by the colonists. (After 1763 the British tried to enforce them more rigorously, causing great resentment among the colonists).

In the early 18th century the population of the North American colonies grew rapidly. It was probably about 300,000 at the end of the 17th century but by 1760 it was over 1 million. By 1780 it had doubled. In the early 18th century the population was boosted by immigrants from Northern Ireland (most of them descended from Scottish Presbyterians). There were also many immigrants from Scotland itself. Also in the early 18th century there were many German immigrants. Land was cheap in North America and it attracted many people hoping for a better life.

**THE GREAT PROCLAMATION**

However relations between the colonists and the mother country turned sour after 1763. The British had just finished fighting the Seven Years War against France. They had won Canada but the war was very expensive. The British were keen to prevent any wars with the Native Americans, which might prove expensive. In 1763 a royal proclamation known as the Great Proclamation sought to ban any further westward expansion. It forbade people to settle in 'any lands beyond the heads or sources of any of the rivers which fall into the Atlantic Ocean from the West or Northwest'. This proclamation was ignored by the colonists but it also caused great resentment. The colonists objected to being told by the British government that they could not expand westwards.

**NO TAXATION WITHOUT RESPRESENTATION**

Furthermore in 1763 Americans paid few taxes, certainly less than the British. The British felt that the Americans should pay a greater contribution towards the cost of their defense. In 1764 the British Prime Minister, George Grenville, passed the Sugar Act. (So called because it affected imports of molasses from the West Indies. Its proper name was the American Revenue Act.) The act actually reduced duty on molasses but steps were taken to make sure it was collected! (Smuggling was widespread). The Sugar Act infuriated the Americans and they were alienated further by the Currency Act of 1764. The colonies were printing their own money because of a shortage of currency but the act banned the issue of paper money in the American colonies (and so hindered trade).

However most offence was caused by the Stamp Act of 1765, which imposed duty on legal documents, newspapers and playing cards. It was not just that the Americans hated paying the tax but that they felt a constitutional issue was involved. They believed that since they were not represented in the British parliament it had no right to impose taxes on them. In the immortal phrase 'no taxation without representation'. The Stamp Act soon proved to be unenforceable. Colonial assemblies denounced it and in October 1765 a number of colonies sent delegates to a 'Stamp act Congress' to organize resistance. Imports of British goods were boycotted and debts to British merchants were suspended. Rioters attacked tax collectors and their property. Eventually in March 1766 the British were forced to repeal the Stamp Act. However at the same time they passed the Declaratory Act, which said that parliament was sovereign over all American colonies. This stupid act simply annoyed the colonists.

Moreover the British had learned nothing. In 1767 the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Townshend, imposed duties on lead, glass, paint, oil and tea. Once again the colonists boycotted imports of British goods and once again the British government was forced to back down. By March 1770 all duties except those on tea were removed.

**THE BOSTON MASSACRE AND THE BOSTON TEA PARTY**

However American public opinion was galvanized by the 'Boston massacre' of March 1770. A group of people in Boston threw snowballs at British soldiers. The soldiers opened fire, killing 5 people and wounding 6 of them. Worse all 6 of the 8 soldiers put on trial for the deaths were acquitted. Two were found guilty of manslaughter and branded on the thumbs. The British failure to execute anybody for the massacre outraged American opinion.

Then in 1773 the British East India Company sent tea to the American colonies to sell. Three ships were sent to Boston with 298 chests of tea. However Boston was a center of resistance to the British. On 16 December 1773 men dressed as Indians boarded the ships and threw the tea into the sea.

The British Prime Minister, Lord North, behaved very unwisely. In 1774 a series of laws were passed called the Coercive or Intolerable Acts. The port of Boston was closed and the seat of government was moved to Salem. The charter of Massachusetts was changed to give the royal governor more power.

The Americans were also annoyed by the Quebec Act of 1774. This was an attempt by the British parliament to make the French Catholics loyal to the British Crown. The Act extended the boundaries of Quebec southward and westward. The Americans feared the king intended to settle loyal French speaking Catholics in the West to increase his own power in the region.

**THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS**

Finally in September 1774 a Continental Congress met to decide policy. They demanded the repeal of the Coercive Acts and of the Quebec Act. The Congress also denounced British interference in American affairs and asserted the right of colonial assemblies to pass laws and raise taxes as they saw fit.

In September 1774 a man named Joseph Galloway put forward a compromise plan. The king would be allowed to appoint president-general and the colonial assemblies would elect a grand council. However the Congress rejected his plan.

Furthermore the British refused to compromise with the Americans. On 5 February 1775 they declared that Massachusetts was in a state of rebellion. British troops were given a free hand to deal with it.

However the American colonies had militias made up of civilians and they resisted the British. Fighting began on 19 April 1775 when British soldiers attempted to seize a colonial arms dump near Concord. The militia were warned that the British were coming. At Lexington the British were met by the militia. The British opened fire killing 8 Americans. Meanwhile the Americans had removed the weapons. The British advanced to Concord and fired upon the militia but then withdrew. They retreated back to Boston with the Americans firing at them along the way. During the march the British lost 73 dead and 200 wounded or missing. The American Revolution had begun.

From April 1775 to March 1776 the British army was besieged in Boston. They could be supplied by sea by the British navy. Nevertheless they soon ran short of supplies. On May 25 the British were reinforced but they were unable to break out. Eventually they were evacuated by sea to Canada.

The Continental Congress met again in May 1775 and agreed to raise an army. George Washington was made its commander in chief. Congress hoped they could force the British to negotiate but George III refused to compromise. Instead in August 1775 he declared that all the American colonies were in a state of rebellion.

Meanwhile rule by royal governor broke down and the people demanded government without royal interference. In May 1776 Congress decided that royal government should cease and government should be 'under the authority of the people'. Subsequently the colonies drew up state constitutions to replace their charters.

Meanwhile the fire was stoked by Tom Paine (1737-1809). In 1776 he published a pamphlet called Common Sense, which rejected all talk of negotiation with the British and demanded complete independence. Common Sense became a best seller.

On 7 June 1776 Richard Henry Lee of the Virginia Assembly presented Congress with resolutions declaring the independence of the colonies, calling for a confederation and expressed the need to find foreign allies for a war against Britain. On 11 June Congress appointed a committee to write a declaration of independence. It was signed on 4 July 1776.

**PART TWO THE EARLY USA**

**THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR**

At first sight the British had many advantages. They greatly outnumbered the Americans and had much greater resources. However they were handicapped by long lines of communication. (In those days it took a sailing ship 6 to 8 weeks to cross the Atlantic). The British won the battle of Long Island in August 1776 and in September 1776 they captured New York. Washington was forced to retreat. However Washington won victories at Trenton in December 1776 and at Princeton in January 1777. The Americans were defeated at Brandywine in September 1777 but they won a decisive victory at Saratoga in October. A British force led by Burgoyne marched south from Canada but was surrounded and forced to surrender.

Saratoga convinced the French that the Americans might win the war. As a result they declared war on Britain, their traditional enemy in 1778. French naval activity in the Atlantic made it even harder for the British to supply their forces in America. Spain declared war on Britain in 1779 and the Dutch declared war in 1780. The Spanish and Dutch tied down British forces in Europe.

Furthermore the Americans won victories at Kings Mountain in October 1780 and at Cowpens in January 1781. Cornwallis, the British Commander, unwisely concentrated his forces on the coast at Yorktown, Virginia. However the French navy blockaded him while the Americans besieged him from the land. The British were forced to surrender. Yorktown was a catastrophic defeat for the British and ended any hope of them ending the war. Nevertheless it continued for 2 more years before the Treaty of Paris ended it in September 1783.

[Life in 18th Century Colonial America](http://www.localhistories.org/18thcentcolonial.html)

**THE FOUNDATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

In 1777 Articles of Confederation were drawn up which joined the states into a loose federation. However the arrangement proved unsatisfactory. In 1787 each state sent delegates to a convention in Philadelphia to remedy this. Between May and September 1787 they wrote a new constitution. The first Congress met in 1789 and George Washington became the first President. In 1791 ten amendments, known as the Bill of Rights were ratified.

In the late 18th century and the early 19th century the population of the USA grew rapidly. Immigrants from Europe poured into the country including many from Germany. Meanwhile the USA expanded westward. In 1791 Vermont was admitted to the union as the 14th state. Kentucky became the 15th state in 1792 and Tennessee the 16th in 1796. In 1803 Ohio became the 17th state.

**THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE**

Also in 1803 American territory was greatly increased by the Louisiana purchase. France claimed a vast amount of land in central North America around the Missouri River and the Arkansas River. In 1803 Napoleon agreed to sell the lot for $15 million. Buying the French land meant there was now no bar to the USA spreading across the continent to the Pacific Ocean. Louisiana became the 18th state of the union in 1812.

**THE WAR OF 1812**

Meanwhile the Americans and British fought another war. This war came about partly because, after 1807, the British navy blockaded European ports during the war with Napoleon and they prevented American ships from delivering their cargoes. They also boarded American ships looking for deserters. Some of the men they arrested were not deserters at all. Finally some Americans wished to invade Canadian territory. War was declared on 18 June 1812. The senators voted 19 to 13 for war. However not all Americans actively supported the war. Some were, at best, lukewarm in their support. This dissension weakened the American war effort. On the other hand American sailors were all volunteers while many sailors in the British navy were forced to join by press gangs. Volunteers were, generally, better than pressed men, one reason why America did well in naval battles.

However an American attempt to invade Canada failed. However the American navy had more success. They won a victory on Lake Erie in September 1813. However Napoleon abdicated in April 1814 allowing the British to send more forces to North America. In August 1814 a British expedition landed and captured Washington. They withdrew after a few weeks. A peace treaty was signed at the end of 1814. However a major battle was fought *after* it was signed. The British were severely defeated at the Battle of New Orleans on 8 January 1815.

**THE GROWTH OF THE USA**

In 1804 Meriwether Lewis and William Clark set out to explore what is now the northwest United States. In 1805 they followed the Missouri River to its headwaters then crossed the Rocky Mountains and reached the Pacific. They returned in 1806.

By 1810 the population of the USA was over 7.2 million and it continued to grow rapidly. By 1820 it was over 9.6 million and by 1840 over 17 million. More and more states were added to union. Indiana was admitted in 1816. Mississippi followed in 1817. Illinois became a state in 1818 and Alabama in 1819. Missouri became a state in 1821. It was followed by Arkansas in 1836 and Michigan in 1837.

The American economy also grew rapidly. In the south cotton expanded rapidly after Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin in 1793. It also grew because Britain was industrializing. There was a huge cotton industry in Britain in the early 19th century, which devoured cotton from America. In the North trade and commerce grew rapidly. By 1860 more than 60% of the world's cotton was grown in the USA.

In the decades after the war of 1812 the Northern States began to industrialize. Coal mining and manufacturing industries boomed.

In 1817 the New York legislature authorized a canal from the Hudson River to Lake Erie. The canal was completed in 1825 and it cut the cost of transporting freight. Furthermore the first railroad was built in the USA was built in 1828.

After 1814 there was fighting between Seminole Indians from Florida and settlers from Georgia. The Seminoles also allowed runaway slaves to live among them, which annoyed the Americans. Eventually, in 1818 Andrew Jackson led a force into Florida (although it was Spanish territory). This was the first Seminole War. Spain ceded Florida to the USA in 1821. Florida became a US state in 1845.

**TEXAS JOINS THE USA**

In the 1820s the Mexican government welcomed Americans who wished to settle in its thinly populated territory of Texas. However in the American settlers soon quarreled with their Mexican masters and in 1835 they began a rebellion. On 1 March 1836 a convention met and on 2 March 1836 they signed a Texas Declaration of Independence. Meanwhile a force of Mexicans under Santa Anna besieged about 189 men in the fortress at Alamo. All the defenders were eventually killed and the Alamo passed into legend. Apart from Americans Scots fought at the Alamo, so did Irishmen and Englishmen. There was also a Welshman and a Dane.

However on 21 April 1836 Texan troops under Sam Houston routed the Mexican army under Santa Anna at the battle of San Jacinto. Texas became independent and Sam Houston became its first president. In 1845 the USA annexed Texas and it became the 28th US state. However the Mexicans never accepted the independence of Texas and they were infuriated when the Americans annexed the territory. The US annexation of Texas led directly to war with Mexico.

**THE MEXICAN WAR**

In 1845, fearing the Mexicans would invade Texas, President Polk sent troops under Zachary Taylor to the Rio Grande. The Mexicans ambushed an American patrol north of the river. However the Americans defeated the Mexicans at the battles of Palo Alto on 8 May 1846 and Reseca de la Palma on 9 May 1846. On 13 May 1846 Congress declared war on Mexico. On 21 September Taylor attacked Monterrey. An armistice was agreed and the Mexican troops withdrew. Santa Anna counterattacked on 22 February 1847 but he was defeated.

Then General Scott captured Veracruz on 28 March 1847. He then marched on Mexico City and captured it in mid-September 1847. The Mexican War was ended by the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in February 1848. Mexico ceded New Mexico and California to the USA.

**THE PACIFIC COAST OF THE USA**

The population of California boomed when a gold rush occurred. Gold was discovered at Sutters Mill on 24 January 1848. In the fall of 1848 newspapers in the East published the news that gold could be found in California and a gold rush began. By early 1849 large numbers of men set out for California hoping to make their fortune. By 1852 the population of California reached 250,000. The huge wave of migrants created a huge demand for industries products and the Californian economy prospered. California was admitted to the union as a state in 1850.

Meanwhile, in the 1840s and 1850s, many settlers traveled along the Oregon Trail. The trail was used by trappers from the early 19th century but the first wagon train traveled along it in 1842. It was followed by many others but railroads eventually made the trail obsolete. Oregon was admitted to the union as a state in 1859.

**THE INDIAN WARS**

As the USA expanded westward there were many wars with the Indians. In 1790 Chief Little Turtle of the Miami defeated an American force under Josiah Harmar. The next year the Americans were defeated again. However in 1794 American troops decisively defeated the natives at the Battle of Fallen Timbers. By the treaty of Greenville, 1795, the natives were forced to cede most of Ohio to the Americans.

During the war of 1812 some natives sided with the British. The Creeks won a battle against the Americans at Fort Sims in 1812. However troops led by Andrew Jackson defeated the Creeks at Horseshoe Bend in 1814. The Treaty of Fort Jackson forced the Creeks to cede more than half their land to the Americans. (It later became the state of Alabama).

Andrew Jackson later became President and in 1830 he signed the Indian Removal Bill which forced Indians east of the Mississippi River to move to Oklahoma.

The Choctaws were forced to move in 1832. They were followed by the Creeks in 1835 and the Chickasaw in 1837. The Cherokee's were forced to move in 1838-39. (So many of them died on the trail it was called the 'Trail of Tears'). However one tribe, the Seminoles of Florida, resisted deportation. In the years 1835-1842 they fought a guerrilla war against the Americans. This was the Second Seminole War. However in 1837 their leader, Osceola, was captured. Most of the Seminoles eventually surrendered and were forced to move to Oklahoma but several hundred escaped and fought another war in 1855-1858. This was the Third Seminole War.

In the 1850s the USA also fought wars with the natives of the Northwest. The natives were defeated in the Rogue River War of 1855-56 and the Yakima War of 1855-58. Afterwards they were forced onto reservations.

**THE USA IN THE MID-19TH CENTURY**

The USA continued to grow rapidly and by 1860 its population was 31 million. New states were added. Iowa was added to the union in 1846. Wisconsin followed in 1848 and Kansas was admitted in 1861.

However the rapidly growing nation was torn apart by the issue of slavery.

When the constitution was written in 1787 many people hoped that slavery would die out of its own accord. However Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793 gave slavery a new importance in the southern states. In the northern states slavery was gradually abolished and the USA became divided into 'free states' and 'slave states'.

**THE MISSOURI COMPROMISE**

In 1803 the USA bought land from France. This was known as the Mississippi purchase. In 1819 part of the territory asked to be admitted to the union as a state in which slavery was allowed. However at that time the USA was evenly divided between free states and slave states. Another slave state would upset the balance. Furthermore northerners feared that more slave states would be created in future. Representative James Tallmade of New York proposed an amendment, which would have ended slavery in Missouri. However it did not become law.

A row occurred between northerners who believed that Congress had the power to ban slavery in new states and southerners who believed that new states had the right to allow slavery if they wished. Eventually an agreement was reached. Missouri was admitted as a slave state but at the same time part of Massachusetts became the state of Maine so the balance of slave and free was preserved. Furthermore a line was drawn across the continent. States north of it were to be free, south of it they were to be slave. However the Missouri compromise was only a temporary solution. Gaining new territory from Mexico created new tensions. In 1846 a man named David Wilmot introduced the Wilmot proviso, which stated that slavery should not be allowed in any territory taken from Mexico. It was added as an amendment to bills but was never passed by Congress. Nevertheless the Wilmot Proviso alienated the south.

**THE COMPROMISE OF 1850**

Eventually a compromise was reached. The Compromise of 1850 stated that the territories of New Mexico and Utah could decide for themselves whether they wished to allow slavery or not when they applied to become states. A fugitive slave law was also passed which said that slaves who ran away to the north should be returned to their masters.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 organized the territories of Kansas and Nebraska. It also ended the Missouri Compromise. The compromise drew a line across the continent and banned slavery north of it. Although Kansas and Nebraska were north of the line the Act allowed them to choose whether to permit slavery or not when they applied to become states.

In Kansas supporters and opponents of slavery came to blows in a series of violent incidents called 'Bleeding Kansas'.

Feeling against slavery in the north was strengthened by Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel Uncle Tom's Cabin, which was published in 1852.

In the Dred-Scott case of 1857 the southern-dominated Supreme Court decided that slaves were not and never could be US citizens. It also declared the 1820 Missouri Compromise unconstitutional. The case enraged public opinion in the north.

The civil war was not caused just by the question of slavery. North and south were also divided over tariffs. The northern states began to industrialize in the early 19th century. By the middle of the century the north was becoming an industrial, urban society. Northerners wanted tariffs to protect their industries. However the south remained an agricultural society. Its economy was based on plantations worked by slaves. Southerners objected to tariffs because they bought goods from the north or from Europe and tariffs made them more expensive. North and south were quite different economically and culturally.

**THE OUTBREAK OF CIVIL WAR**

The civil war was finally provoked by the election of Abraham Lincoln 1809-1865 as president. Lincoln did not believe he had the power to abolish slavery in states where it already existed. However he firmly opposed the expansion of slavery into territories of the USA, which were likely to become states in future. His policy meant that in future free states would outnumber slave ones. As a result of his election South Carolina ceded from the union on 20 December 1860. Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas followed it early in 1861. Together they formed the Confederate States of America on 4 February 1861. Jefferson Davis(1808-1889) became the President.

Fighting began on 12 April 1861. Fort Sumter was a unionist stronghold under Major Robert Anderson. On 12 April the Confederate General Beauregard ordered the unionists to evacuate the fort. The unionists rejected his terms and that day southern artillery bombarded the fort. Fort Sumter was forced to surrender the next day but the unionist soldiers were allowed to retreat to the north. Afterwards both sides began arming for war.

Following Fort Sumter Arkansas ceded from the union on 6 May 1861. It was followed by Tennessee and North Carolina.

However the south was easily outmatched by the north. In the south there were only 5 1/2 million whites and over 3 1/2 million slaves. The north outnumbered the south 4 to 1 in men of military age. Furthermore while the north had begun to industrialize the south remained an agricultural society. About 90% of manufacturing industry was in the north of 2/3 of US railroads. Furthermore the south suffered from disunity. Since they were firm believers in *states* rights the confederate states could not form a firmly united federation.

Despite these disadvantages the south won some early victories.

**THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR**

In July 1861 General Beauregard was in charge of 22,000 confederate troops an Manassas Junction by the Bull Run River. General McDowell marched south with over 30,000 unionist soldiers. They attacked the confederates on 21 July 1861. However they were held in check by troops led by Thomas 'Stonewall' Jackson. Eventually the unionists retreated.

However in the west the unionists won a significant victory at Shiloh on 6-7 April 1862. On the first day the confederates had some success but they were unable to drive the unionists off the field completely. Unionist reinforcements arrived that night and on 7 April the confederates were forced to retreat with heavy losses. In Louisiana unionists captured New Orleans on 25 April and Baton Rouge on 12 May.

In April 1862 the Army of the Potomac, led by General McClellan began the Peninsular Campaign. They captured Yorktown on 4 May 1862. By late May McClellan reached the outskirts of Richmond. However in late June 1862 General Robert E. Lee attacked and fought a series of battles called 'The Seven Days'. McClellan was forced to retreat.

In August 1862 the two armies clashed at a battle known as Second Bull Run or Second Manassas. It was a decisive southern victory and the northern army retreated. Lee invaded the north and the two armies fought at Antietam. Lee was forced to retreat into Virginia.

However the unionists were severely defeated at Fredericksburg on 13 December 1862. Robert E. Lee won another brilliant victory at Chancellorsville in May 1863.

Lee invaded the north again in June 1863. The turning point of the war was at Gettysburg in July 1863. The two armies clashed on 1-3 July. At first the confederates had some success. Eventually, however, they were forced to retreat with heavy losses. The south also suffered defeat at Vicksburg on the Mississippi. General Grant laid siege to the town and captured it on 4 July 1863. From the middle of 1863 the south's fortunes gradually waned. In November the south suffered another defeat at Chattanooga.

In May 1864 both sides suffered heavy losses at the Battle of the Wilderness in Virginia. The unionists were unable to capture Petersburg or Richmond for many months.

Meanwhile, after Chattanooga, General Sherman began to advance through Georgia towards the sea. His army entered Atlanta on 3 September 1864. On 21 December 1861 Sherman's troops captured Savannah on the coast. The confederacy was cut in half. Then, in February 1865, Sherman headed north into South Carolina. He captured Columbia on 19 February 1865. Then he pressed on into North Carolina.

Further north Robert E. Lee faced increasing pressure from Grant's forces in Virginia. On 2 April 1864 the confederates abandoned Petersburg and Richmond. Finally on 9 April 1865 Lee surrendered to Grant at Appotomax Court House. That was effectively the end of the civil war. The rest of the confederate forces surrendered soon afterwards. Johnston surrendered to Sherman on 18 April and the last confederate army surrendered on 26 May 1865.

However Lincoln did not live to see the end of the war. John Wilkes Booth assassinated him on 15 April 1865. Lincoln was watching a play in Ford's Theater when Booth shot him in the head. Andrew Johnson took his place.

**THE END OF SLAVERY**

At first Lincoln was reluctant to abolish slavery in the south. However he eventually changed his mind. On 23 September 1862 he made the Emancipation Proclamation. Slaves would be made free in any states still in rebellion on 1 January 1863. However this only applied to areas occupied by the unionist army *after* that date it did not apply to areas *already* under unionist control. However the proclamation was followed by the 13th amendment, which banned slavery. It was ratified by December 1865.

[A history of slavery](http://www.localhistories.org/slavery.html)

**RECONSTRUCTION IN THE SOUTH**

Johnson appointed provincial governors for the former confederate states. In each of them a constitutional convention was elected to draw up a new constitution.

However although they were forced to accept the end of slavery southern governments drew up 'black codes' which restricted black peoples rights, such as depriving them of the right to vote or to sit on juries. Southern whites were completely unwilling to accept the former slaves as equals.

Johnson was unwilling to force the south to change. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act 1866. It stated that all people born in the USA were now citizens regardless of race, color or previous condition (i.e. if they were former slaves). Johnson vetoed the act but congress overrode his presidential veto.

Johnson's refusal to take firm action against the south alienated Congress. They passed the first Reconstruction Act in 1867. (It was followed by other acts). The southern governments were removed from power and the former confederate states were placed under military rule again. They were forced to allow black men the right to vote.

However the southern states were gradually re-admitted to the union and allowed to send senators and representatives to Congress again.

In 1875 Congress passed the Civil Rights Act. By it all people regardless of race, color or previous condition, were entitled to full and equal treatment in 'inns, public conveyances on land or water, theaters and other places of public amusement'. However in 1883 the Supreme Court decided the Act was unconstitutional.

When Rutherford Hayes was inaugurated as President in 1877 he withdrew troops from the south. The former confederate states were then left to go their own way without any interference from the north. In the south white people re-asserted their rule and black people were forced to become subservient. Between 1890 and 1908 black people were deprived of the right to vote in all the former confederate states.

Furthermore in 1866-1867 the Ku Klux Klan was formed to terrorize black people. They played an important role in restoring white rule by scaring black people into not voting.

**PART THREE THE RISE OF THE USA**

In the late 19th century the population of the USA grew very rapidly. In 1860 the population was 31 million. By 1900 it was almost 76 million. Immigrants from Europe poured into the USA hoping for a better life. Many people were lured by the Homesteader Act of 1862. Settlers were offered 160 acres of land free provided they agreed to till it for 5 years. (However Chinese immigration into the USA was ended by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882).

American industry also boomed. In the late 19th century the USA was the fastest growing industrial nation in the world. By the end of the century it had surpassed Britain in production of iron and steel. The American railroad network also grew rapidly. In 1850 there were 9,000 miles of railways. By 1900 there were 190,000 miles. The first transcontinental railroad was built in 1869.

Meanwhile, in 1859, Edwin Drake (1819-1899) struck oil in Pennsylvania. Soon there was a flourishing oil industry in Pennsylvania. The first oil pipeline was built in 1865.

In 1874 Levi Strauss began making riveted jeans.

An increasing number of Americans lived in cities. By 1900 almost 1/3 of them did. by then there were more than 40 cities with a population of over 100,000. (It wasn't until 1920 that the majority of Americans lived in cities). Conditions in the industrial cities were often appalling. Many people lived in overcrowded slums.

Meanwhile American agriculture continued to boom. It was helped by new technology. Cyrus McCormick invented a mechanical reaper in 1834. John Deere (1804-1886) invented the steel plow in 1838. In 1854 the first successful self-governing windmill (that changed direction automatically to face the wind) was made. In 1874 barbed wire was patented.

**THE PLAINS INDIANS**

Westward expansion inevitably meant wars with the plains Indians. From the 1860s to the 1880s a series of wars were fought.

Eventually all the Indian Wars were won by the whites because of their superior technology. They also hunted the buffalo, the main food supply, almost to extinction. The plains tribes such as the Cheyenne, Arapaho and Sioux were all forced to move onto reservations.

Conditions on the reservations were appalling. Rations were inadequate and in some cases there was near starvation. Then in 1888 a Pauite Indian called Wovok claimed he was the messiah. He claimed that soon North America would be restored to the Natives and the plains would run black with buffalo again. His followers did the ghost dance. This new religious movement alarmed the white men. It ended with a massacre at Wounded Knee on 29 December 1890. Soldiers were sent to disarm a group of Indians but one man refused to surrender his gun. Somebody started shooting and the rest of the soldiers followed killing many Indians (possibly as many as 350). The massacre at Wounded Knee marked the end of the Indian Wars and the final triumph of the white man.

Meanwhile in 1881 Helen Hunt Jackson published A Century of Dishonor which showed how unjustly the native people had been treated. However in 1887 the Dawes Act was passed. It stated that tribal lands should be divided up into individual holdings. The intention was to undermine the tribal way of life and force the natives to adopt the white way of life. Furthermore after the land was divided a great deal was left over. It was declared 'surplus' and sold. As a result the amount of land held by Indians declined drastically.

The year 1890 was significant for another reason. By then the frontier had disappeared as settlers moved across the continent.

In the late 19th century several new states were added to the union. West Virginia was admitted in 1863. Nevada followed in 1864. Nebraska was admitted in 1867. It was followed by Colorado in 1876. In 1889 four new states were admitted to the union, North and South Dakota, Montana and Washington. In 1890 Idaho and Wyoming were admitted. Utah followed in 1896.

**THE SPANISH WAR**

In 1898 the USA fought a war with Spain. In the 1890s Cuba rebelled against Spanish rule and the Spanish dealt with the rebels very harshly. That enraged American public opinion. On 15 February 1898 an American battleship, Maine, blew up in Havana Harbor, killing 260 men. It is not certain what caused the explosion but many people blamed the Spanish. On 25 April 1898 the USA went to war. On 1 May Spanish ships were destroyed in Manila Harbor. US soldiers landed in the Philippines and they captured Manila on 13 August. Meanwhile a Spanish fleet was destroyed outside Santiago on 3 July. US soldiers landed in Cuba and captured Santiago on 17 July. The last Spanish troops in Cuba surrendered on 26 July. An armistice was signed on 14 August. By a peace treaty, which was signed in Paris on 10 December 1898, Cuba became independent while the USA took the Philippines, Puerto Rico and Guam.

The Spanish War proved the USA was now a great power. By 1910 the USA had overtaken Britain as the richest and most powerful nation in the world. By then the population of the USA had reached 92 million.

[Life in 19th Century America](http://www.localhistories.org/west.html)

**20TH CENTURY USA**

In the early 20th century three new states were admitted to the union, Oklahoma in 1907 and Arizona and New Mexico in 1912.

Also in the early 20th century the USA built the Panama Canal. President Theodore Roosevelt decided to build a canal across Panama in 1902. In 1903 the USA leased a 6-mile wide canal zone for 99 years. The canal was built in the years 1904-1914.

**THE USA IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

When the First World War began in 1914 the USA remained neutral. However Germany alienated American public opinion on 7 May 1915 when a German submarine sank the Cunard liner Lusitania, without warning. Among the 1,198 people killed were 128 Americans. Nevertheless Woodrow Wilson fought the 1916 election partly on the slogan 'he kept us out of the war'.

However on 1 February 1917 Germany began unrestricted submarine warfare. That meant that any neutral ship attempting to trade with Britain was a target for submarines. Furthermore British intelligence intercepted a telegram from Arthur Zimmerman, German Foreign Secretary. It stated that in the event of a war between Germany and the USA efforts should be made to persuade Mexico to attack the USA. The Mexicans were offered parts of the USA as a reward if they did so.

On 6 April 1917 the USA declared war on Germany. America had a strong navy but a relatively small army. However conscription was introduced and the USA began to raise a huge army. The first US troops were sent to France in June 1917 but it was the spring of 1918 before large numbers arrived. By September the US commander General John J. Pershing was able to begin an offensive against the Germans. In September 1918 US troops destroyed a German salient at St Mihiel. They then launched an attack on the Meuse-Argonne area. German troops were pushed back until Germany surrendered on 11 November 1918.

Meanwhile women gained the vote. In April 1917 only 11 states allowed women to vote. However in 1918 the House adopted the 14th amendment, which allowed women to vote. It was ratified in 1919 and came into effect in 1920.

The early 20th century saw internal migration in the USA. Many black people moved from the south to the north especially to the big cities. The National Association For The Advancements of Colored Peoples was founded in 1909 to improve conditions for black people. However there were race riots in several cities in 1919.

However immigration *into* the USA was severely restricted after 1921 when the Emergency Quota Act was passed.

**THE 1920s**

For most people (not all) the 1920s were a time of prosperity. In 1912 only 16% of homes had electric light. By 1927 it had risen to 63%. Electrical appliances became common, refrigerators, irons and fans. Radios also became common. By 1930 40% of homes had one. Cars also became common in the 1920s. Americans enjoyed the highest standard of living in the world.

The 1920s were also the era of prohibition. The eighteenth amendment was ratified in 1919 and came into force in 1920. It banned the 'manufacture, sale or transportation' of alcohol. However people simply made alcohol illegally and drank it in 'speakeasies'. Worse, prohibition boosted organized crime as gangsters tried to control the supply of alcohol. Prohibition ended in 1933.

**THE WALL STREET CRASH**

In 1929 the American economy began to falter. Demand for new cars fell and house building slowed down. However the stock market continued to boom in the late 1920s. Many people bought stocks with borrowed money. As a result the stock market became inflated. Prices rose to a very high level. However, inevitably, some people began to sell. From mid-September prices fell. On 24 October 1929, known as Black Thursday, panic selling began and prices fell catastrophically, an event known as the Wall Street Crash. Business confidence disappeared, banks failed and industry slumped. By 1932 industrial production in the USA had fallen by half and exports fell to one third of their 1929 level. Unemployment went through the roof. By 1932 about one quarter of the work force was unemployed. When people lost their jobs they could no longer buy goods and demand fell so *more* people lost their jobs. There had been economic slumps in America before but his one was more severe than anything previously experienced. It was known as the Depression.

**THE DEPRESSION**

President Hoover did try and help. He persuaded employers to maintain wages at their present levels. He also increased spending on roads, bridges and public buildings. However Hoover refused to introduce federal unemployment relief. He believed in what he called 'Rugged individualism'. He believed too much state help would make people dependent.

For the unemployed life during the depression was very harsh. Many were reduced to attending soup kitchens run by charities. (The soup was sometimes called 'Hoover stew'). Destitute people lived in shantytowns they called Hoovervilles. Hoover became deeply unpopular and in 1932 Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected President.

**THE NEW DEAL**

Roosevelt assured the American people that the only thing they had to fear was fear itself. He promised the American people 'A New Deal'. However between 1933 and 1939 he had only limited success. Unemployment fell to between 14% and 15% by 1937. However in that year the economy dipped again. (It was called the recession) and unemployment rose to 17%. However industrial production rose to its 1929 level again by 1939.

At first Roosevelt persuaded Congress to pass a number of laws in a hectic period known as 'The Hundred Days'. One of the first things Roosevelt did was to close all the banks in the USA by law. The Emergency Banking Act of 9 March 1933 meant they would only open again if the Federal government declared they were solvent. This measure persuaded people it was safe to deposit their savings in banks. Restoring faith in banks was the first step to dealing with the depression.

On 12 May 1933 the Federal Emergency Relief Act was passed to help the unemployed. The states were given grants to provide work like repairing roads and improving parks and schools.

Also in 1933 Roosevelt founded the civilian Conservation Corps, which employed young men on conservation projects. A Public Works Administration was created which built public buildings, bridges and dams. Also the Tennessee Valley Authority was created to build dams and hydroelectric plants.

The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 tried to raise the price of farm produce by reducing supply. Land was set aside and deliberately not used. In 1937 the Farm Security Administration was formed to lend money to tenant farmers to buy their land.

However farmers on the plains suffered terribly during the depression. Over planting, overgrazing and a drought combined to create a 'dust bowl'. Many farmers abandoned the land and went to California in search of work.

In 1935 the Social Security Act created old age pensions and an unemployment insurance scheme. Also in 1935 the National Labor Relations Act or Wagner Act upheld workers right to collective bargaining. In 1938 a Fair Labor Standards Act created a minimum wage.

Despite all of Roosevelt's efforts the depression only ended with the coming of war.

**THE APPROACH OF WAR**

In 1940 Germany conquered Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and France. In response Roosevelt started to expand American armed forces. He introduced conscription. Although American public opinion was opposed to joining the war Roosevelt declared that America must be 'the arsenal of democracy'. In January 1941 he introduced the lend-lease bill to Congress. It empowered him to sell, lend or lease arms, food or any other supplies to any country whose defense he deemed vital to the United States. At first lend-lease applied only to Britain but in August Roosevelt extended it to Russia. American troops also occupied Iceland.

**THE USA IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

On 7 December 1941 the Japanese attacked the American Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor. The next day Congress declared war on Japan. On 11 December 1941 Germany and Italy declared war on the USA.

The USA mobilized all its resources for war. Industrial output doubled during World War II and by 1943 there was full employment. Only 2,000 aircraft were made in 1939 but by 1944 the figure was 96,000. The American public suffered less than people in other countries because the USA escaped occupation or air raids.

During World War II many black people migrated from the south to the north and west. Black people became increasingly dissatisfied with their position in American society. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples increased its membership. The Congress for Racial Equality was formed in 1942.

From March 1942 people of Japanese descent, on the west coast, were interned. By September over 100,000 of them had been moved inland. Yet many Japanese Americans served in the US armed forces.

The USA's massive industrial strength made the defeat of the Axis powers (Germany, Italy and Japan) inevitable. Unfortunately Roosevelt did not live to see the end of the war. He died on 12 April 1945.

**PART FOUR THE MODERN USA**

**THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE**

After World War II the USA was by far the richest and most powerful nation in the world. However relations between the USA and the Soviet Union quickly cooled after 1945. By 1947 the Cold War had begun.

In 1946 the British were helping the Greek government fight communist guerrillas. However Britain was exhausted after World War II and could not continue. On 12 March 1947 Truman announced that the USA must 'support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.' Truman hoped the aid would be primarily financial. The USA gave money to both Greece and Turkey. The USA also provided massive aid for Europe, which was devastated by war. The aid given was called the Marshall Plan after Secretary of State George C. Marshall who first proposed aid for Europe in June 1947. The aid was given in 1948-1951 and it greatly assisted European recovery. However in 1950 the USA was drawn into the Korean War.

**THE FAIR DEAL**

In his domestic policy Truman tried to extend the New Deal (his policies became known as the 'Fair Deal'. but he was frustrated by Congress which refused to pass most of his proposed laws. However in 1946 the Employment Act committed the federal government to the aim of full employment. In 1949 Congress increased the minimum wage and extended state benefits to another 10 million people. Furthermore in 1949 the Housing Act provided for slum clearance and for public housing for more than 800,000 people.

**McCARTHYISM IN THE USA**

The early 1950s was the era of McCarthyism. At that time there was a great fear of communist infiltration. In 1946 Winston Churchill announced that an 'iron curtain' was descending across Europe. Puppet communist regimes were installed in Eastern Europe in countries like Hungary and Bulgaria.

However in Czechoslovakia elections were held. For a time democratic government ruled the country. Yet in 1948 it was overthrown by a communist coup.

Fear was fanned by the case of Alger Hiss. He had been a high-ranking government official. In 1948 a former communist called Whittaker Chambers told the House Un-American Activities Committee (which investigated 'un-American' activity) that Hiss was a spy for the Soviet Union. Hiss denied the charge. He could not be arrested for spying because of a statute of limitation. However he was charged with perjury and he was convicted in January 1950. The case increased fears of communist subversion.

Furthermore in 1949 the Russians exploded an atomic bomb. The American people were shocked to hear that spies had helped the Russians to develop a bomb by leaking them information.

Into this atmosphere of fear stepped Senator Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957). In February 1950 McCarthy claimed that he had a list of communists employed by the State Department. McCarthy then began a witch-hunt in which many people lost their jobs. However eventually McCarthy overreached himself and he began to accuse too many important people. Public support ebbed away and in December 1954 McCarthy was finally censored by the Senate.

Despite McCarthy the 1950s were a prosperous period for America. Unemployment was low, living standards rose and TV became common. The USA launched its first satellite in 1958. However the prosperity was not shared by everyone.

**THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE USA**

The struggle for civil rights really began in the 1950s. In the south at that time schools were segregated. In 1896 the Supreme Court ruled that segregation was constitutional as long as equal facilities were provided for both groups. In reality, of course, facilities for black people were always inferior. In 1954 the Supreme Court recognized this and overturned the previous decision. However most white people in the south were strongly opposed to desegregation and they dragged their feet. In 1957 when Little Rock Central High School was desegregated 9 black students were prevented from entering, first by the Arkansas National Guard then by the local people. Eventually Eisenhower had to send troops to allow the black students to enter.

In the south most black people did not register to vote. In 1957 and 1960 Civil Rights Acts were passed to try and remove obstacles to them doing so. Neither was very successful.

However black Americans or African Americans had great success with non-violent campaigning. In 1955 Montgomery Alabama had a law, which said black people must sit at the back of buses. In December 1955 a woman called Rosa Parks sat at the front of a bus and refused to move. She was arrested. Black people then organized a boycott of the buses. Finally segregation on buses was ruled unconstitutional. One of the leaders of the boycotts was to become famous. He was the Baptist Minister Martin Luther King (1929-1968).

In 1960 black students in Greensboro, North Carolina were refused service in a restaurant. They then staged a sit-in. The sit-in movement quickly spread to shops, hotels, theaters and parks and had some success in forcing them to desegregate.

In 1962 President Kennedy sent troops to the State University of Mississippi to enforce a court order that a black student should be admitted.

In 1963 a quarter of a million people marched on Washington to demand civil rights legislation. Martin Luther King made a speech beginning with the immortal words 'I have a dream', in which he outlined his vision of racial harmony.

However black campaigners met with violence. In 1963 a campaigner named Medgar Evers was shot and killed. Also in 1963 a bomb exploded in a Baptist church in Birmingham Alabama, killing four black girls. In 1965 the militant black leader Malcolm X was assassinated.

In 1964 Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, which gave all people equal rights in voting, education, public accommodation and federally assisted programs.

However in 1965 black anger and resentment boiled over into rioting. Riots in Los Angeles left 34 people dead. More riots followed in 1966 and in 1967. On 4 April 1968 the great orator Martin Luther King was assassinated. His death provoked further riots.

Native Americans also began to protest about their treatment. In 1968 they formed the American Indian Movement. In 1969 they occupied Alcatraz Island. In 1972 they marched on Washington in the Trail of Broken Treaties and occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In 1973 they occupied Wounded Knee village.

**JOHN F. KENNEDY AND LYNDON B. JOHNSON**

In the early 1960s Kennedy strengthened the American armed forces. He also committed the USA to landing a man on the moon by the end of the decade. Kennedy also created the Peace Corps, which sent volunteers to help with various educational, economic and welfare schemes in poor countries.

In his foreign policy Kennedy agreed to a plan to send 1,500 Cuban refugees to overthrow Cuba. The refugees landed at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 and were quickly routed by the Cuban forces. After that fiasco came the Cuban missiles crisis. The Russians placed long-range missiles on Cuba that were capable of hitting the USA. In 1963 Kennedy also signed a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which was ratified by the Senate in June 1963. Kennedy was assassinated on 22 November 1963.

Lyndon B. Johnson called for an 'all out war on poverty', recognizing that while the USA was the richest country in the world a considerable part of her population were poor. During his presidency several important acts were passed, which it was hoped would tackle the roots of poverty. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 provided for adult education and job training. The Medicare Act of 1965 provided health and hospital insurance for over 65s. The Secondary Education Act of 1965 provided aid for schools with large numbers of poor and deprived children. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 finally removed obstacles to black people voting. It banned the use of literacy tests and gave the federal government power to oversee voter registration and elections in certain circumstances.

**THE VIETNAM WAR**

In the early 20th century the French ruled Vietnam but in 1941 it was occupied by the Japanese. The Americans did not approve of European colonialism and had no wish to see Vietnam handed back to the French after the war. Nevertheless after World War II the French tried to rule Vietnam again. However they were opposed by communist guerrillas.

With the onset of the Cold War American sympathy for the Vietnamese cooled and from 1950 financial aid was given to the French to prop up their rule in Vietnam. Senator John Kennedy said that the USA had 'allied itself to the desperate effort of the French regime to hang on to the remnants of an empire'. He was soon proved right. In 1954 the French were utterly defeated by the guerrillas at Diem Bien Phu. Afterwards they withdrew and Vietnam was split into north and south. In the late 1950s communist guerrillas infiltrated the south. After they attacked US installations in October 1957 the USA began to provide the South Vietnamese dictator with money and materials.

In the 1960s American policy in Vietnam was influenced by the 'domino theory', which said that if one country fell to communism neighboring states would also fall. American involvement in Vietnam really began in 1961 when Kennedy sent the first soldiers.

American involvement increased after August 1964 when North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked US warships. Congress agreed to a resolution allowing the president to 'take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression in Southeast Asia'. As a result American forces in South Vietnam rapidly increased and reached half a million by the end of 1967. The USAF also carried out strategic bombing of the north. However the Vietcong continued to fight a successful guerrilla war. The Vietnam War became increasingly unpopular at home. From 1965 onward anti-war demonstrations were held. Then on 30 January 1968 came the Tet offensive. The Vietcong attacked towns and cities in South Vietnam. Eventually they were repulsed but American public opinion hardened. On 3 April 1968 peace talks began. From 1970 President Nixon slowly withdrew US troops from South Vietnam proposing to let the South Vietnamese defend themselves. The last US troops left in 1973.

**WATERGATE**

The USA was also troubled when its President became involved in a scandal and was forced to resign.

On 17 June 1972 five men broke into the Democratic Party Headquarters in the Watergate Building. The five were arrested. Later two other men, both former White House officials, were also arrested. All the men worked for the Committee for Re-election of the President or CREEP. However President Richard Nixon denied that his administration had anything to do with the break in.

The seven men were all convicted but at the sentencing in March 1973 one of them claimed the White House had arranged a 'cover up' of its involvement in the break in. Subsequently investigations revealed that a number of White House staff were involved in planning the break in and in arranging a 'cover up'.

Nixon firmly denied that he was personally involved in any attempted 'cover up'. However he refused to surrender tapes of conversations in his private office, which would prove his guilt or innocence. In April 1974 he agreed to hand over edited versions. In July 1974 the Supreme Court ordered him to hand over *all* relevant tapes. On 5 August 1974 Nixon surrendered tapes which made it clear that he *was* involved in an attempted 'cover up'. Having lost all support Nixon resigned on 9 August 1974.

After Vietnam and the Watergate scandal the USA suffered a recession in the mid-1970s. Unemployment rose to 8.5% in 1975. Despite its troubles the United States remained by far the richest and most powerful nation in the world.

In 1980 the USA was in the grip of a recession. However in the mid and late 1980s the economy grew steadily. Unemployment was almost 11% in 1982. It fell to 7% in 1985 and 5.5% in 1988. In 1999 it stood at 4.2%. Meanwhile inflation fell from 12.5% in 1980 to 4.4% in 1988.

Meanwhile the Cold War came to a sudden end in 1989 when communism collapsed in Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 leaving the USA the world's only superpower.

**THE USA IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

In the late 20th century the population of the USA grew very rapidly, partly due to immigration. Today the population of the USA is 316 million.

The USA suffered a recession in 2008-2009 but it soon recovered and it remains a very wealthy country.

Meanwhile in 2008 Barack H. Obama was elected the first African American president of the USA.