

CHRONOLOGY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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c. 20,000 B.C.

The first Native Americans may have immigrated by way of the Bering Strait during the glacial period. However, the details and the chronology are highly controversial...

“0”

There is no such thing as the year zero! The year 1 B.C. (“before [the birth of] Christ”) is followed by the year 1 A.D. (“anno domini”, i.e. after the birth of Christ).

c. 1000

Leif Eiriksson allegedly lands at “Vinland”, somewhere at the North American East Coast (Newfoundland? Maine?). He and his Vikings are probably the first Europeans to set foot on the North American mainland, but their presence is short-lived.

1497

Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) is the first European to reach the North American East Coast since Columbus first sailed across the Atlantic in 1492.

c. 1540

Independently from each other, two Spanish conquistadors explore parts of North America: Coronado (from Arizona to Nebraska) and De Soto (from Florida to the Mississippi).

1607

Jamestown (Virginia) becomes the first permanent English settlement in North America.

1613

A Dutch company establishes New Amsterdam as a fur trading post on Manhattan, thus laying the foundation of New York City.

1621

The Mayflower arrives near Cape Cod (Mass.). The Pilgrim Fathers sign the Mayflower Compact, a document that provides for self-government of their little community.

1673

Marquette and Joliet, two French Jesuits, explore the Mississippi.

1681

William Penn is granted the charter for Pennsylvania, a colony of religious freedom which will soon attract German immigrants (cf. Germantown, a suburb of Philadelphia).

1758

In the French and Indian War (Seven Years' War), an expeditionary force takes the French Fort Duquesne, which will be renamed Pittsburgh – the frontier has arrived west of the Appalachian Mountains.

1773

The Boston Tea Party. The American colonists defy the British motherland (“*No taxation without representation!*”)

1776

The Declaration of Independence – one of the most important documents of world history:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government.”

The drafting of the Declaration of Independence is attributed to Thomas Jefferson, later the 3rd president of the United States.

1783

The Treaty of Paris between Great Britain and the United States finishes the War of Independence. Britain acknowledges the extension of U.S. territory to the Mississippi.

1787

The Constitution of the United States is adopted. It proudly starts: *“We the people of the United States...”*

James Madison, who is to become the 4th president of the United States, is considered the father of the Constitution.

1789

In order to make sure that civil rights are respected by the state, the first “Ten Amendments”, a.k.a. the “Bill of Rights”, are added to the Constitution. They have been drafted by James Madison.

George Washington, the hero of the War of Independence, is elected the first president.

1803

President Jefferson strikes the Louisiana Purchase with France (Napoleon). Thus the U.S.A. acquires the whole western half of the Mississippi watershed.

1812

In the War of 1812 the U.S.A. tries to oust Britain from its North American colony, Canada, but the Treaty of Ghent leaves things as they are. From now on the two countries will settle their conflicts peacefully.

1823

In view of the collapse of the Spanish colonial empire in Central and South America, President Monroe declares the Monroe Doctrine: *“America to the Americans!”* – European colonialism in the Western Hemisphere will not be tolerated by the United States.

1830

By the Indian Removal Act, President Jackson prepares the expulsion of the Native Americans from the states east of the Mississippi. (cf. the Cherokees’ “Trail of Tears”)

1845

The former Mexican province of Texas joins the Union. The Battle of the Alamo, lost 9 years earlier, becomes a national myth.

1849

Gold in California! One year later the former Mexican province is admitted as a state to the U.S.A.

1861

After decades of controversy over the slavery and other bones of contention, the Confederation secedes from the Union, which sparks off the American Civil War.

1862

The Homestead Act opens the gate to the colonization of the American West.

1863

President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation marks the end of slavery in the United States, even if most slaves have to wait for the end of the Civil War to enjoy their freedom.

In his Gettysburg Address, Lincoln expresses his confidence that *“government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”*

1865

The Civil War is over, but Lincoln has been assassinated. The wounds of the war will take a long time to heal.

1867

Alaska is bought from Russia – at an incredibly low price, in retrospect...

1869

The first transcontinental railway is completed.

1876

General Custer's cavalry regiment attacks a large camp of Lakota and Cheyenne Indians, led by Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, and is annihilated to the last man – one of the few Indian victories in the Indian Wars.

1890

According to the U.S. Census, the Frontier has ceased to exist.

1904

President Theodore Roosevelt declares the Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine: Whenever disorder arises in the Western Hemisphere, especially when U.S. investments are not protected, it is the right and the duty of the United States to intervene to establish order again.

1914

The Panama Canal connects the Atlantic and Caribbean Coasts with the Pacific Coast. The U.S. presence in the Canal Zone is an obvious mark of the country's predominance in Central America.

1917

The U.S.A. enters the First World War. Early in 1918 President Wilson (D.) will proclaim his "Fourteen Points" as a blueprint for peace. But after the war the nation returns to isolationism, leaving the League of Nations to a powerless fate.

1929

After years of unprecedented affluence and industrial expansion, America is hit by an economic crisis (“Black Friday”).

1933

President Franklin D. Roosevelt (D.) proclaims a “New Deal” which implies radical economic and social reforms.

1941

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor the U.S.A. officially enter the Second World War.

1945

The atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki mark the end of the Second World War. But under the presidency of Harry Truman (D.) the U.S. faces a new world-wide confrontation: The “Cold War” with the Soviet Union.

1953

President Dwight D. Eisenhower (R.) leads the U.S. at a time when affluence and self-complacency are only occasionally punctured by the uglier aspects of world power status: the Korean War, the witch hunts of Senator McCarthy against “Un-American Activities”, the increasing call for equality among the black community, and last but not least the Sputnik shock of 1957.

1961

President John F. Kennedy (D.) leads the nation into a decade of new courage and new aspirations: *“Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”*

1962

The Cuba Crisis: The world at the brink of nuclear war – but the catastrophe is averted by Kennedy and the Soviet leader Khrushchev.

1963

The proudest day of the Civil Rights Movement: Martin Luther King speaks to hundred thousands at a demonstration in Washington.

And the saddest day of the American nation in the 20th century: Kennedy is assassinated. The new president, Lyndon B. Johnson (D.), promotes social progress, but also escalates the Vietnam War.

1969

Soon after Richard Nixon (R.) has taken over the presidency, the NASA sends American astronauts successfully to the moon – the first human to put his foot on the Moon is Neil Armstrong.

With Nixon, there is a relaxation in the American relations to the Soviet Union and China; the armament limitation treaty known as SALT-I is signed.

1973

Nixon and his foreign policy specialist, Henry Kissinger, negotiate the American withdrawal from Vietnam. The nation is left with ten thousands of dead or invalid young men, the economy is left with inflation for years to come.

Sioux Indians stage a protest by occupying Wounded Knee.

The first oil crisis scares motorists and politicians alike.

1974

After his lies in the Watergate Scandal have been disclosed, Nixon must resign because an impeachment (i.e. a parliamentary procedure to dispose him) is imminent.

1976

President Gerald Ford (R.) presides over the Bicentennial - the proudest moment for the U.S. in the 70s.

1977

President Jimmy Carter (D.) is confronted with a weak dollar and a growing feeling of discontent and insecurity.

1979

Meltdown at Three Miles Island near Harrisburg (Pa.) - a narrow escape from a nuclear catastrophe.

In Iran, fanatic Muslims take about 70 hostages in the American embassy in Teheran. For Iranian leader Khomeini the U.S is the empire of the devil (and vice versa).

1980

The U.S. leads most western nations in the boycott of the Moscow Olympics. **1981**

President Ronald Reagan (R.) is confronted with a worldwide economic slump: less inflation, but more unemployment, and massive U.S. deficits in the budget and in the trade balance.

1983

Grenada, a tiny island in the Caribbean, is invaded by American troops - to prevent another communist take-over, according to U.S. statements.

Demonstrations against the armament race by the new peace movement in the U.S. and elsewhere.

1984

Jesse Jackson (D): the first serious black contender for the presidency. Geraldine Ferraro (D.): the first female candidate ever nominated for vice president.

Reagan's landslide victory gives him a second term. His mixture of patriotism, law-and-order politics, anti-communism and SDI visions ("Star Wars"), plus economic laissez-faire ("Reaganomics") has won over the "silent majority". The poor and the minorities are pushed into the background.

1986

Explosion of the space shuttle Challenger - a bitter setback for the NASA and the U.S.

U.S. air raid on Libya - to punish Khaddafi for his support for terrorists, according to U.S. statements.

“Irangate”: Arms for Iran and money for the Nicaraguan contras - the muddle weakens Reagan's popularity.

1987

A worldwide stock exchange crash reveals the instability of the economic boom period.

Reagan and Gorbachev sign the INF treaty - the first arms reduction treaty after the Second World War that deserves this name.

1988

The U.S. dollar hits the bottom at less than DM 1.60.

1989

George Bush (R.), 41st president of the U.S.

The Cold War comes to a sudden end when the communist regimes in Middle and Eastern Europe collapse in the autumn – two years later even the Soviet Union itself will disintegrate.

1991

In the Gulf War against Iraq the U.S.A., now the only super power left, demonstrates its will to make its power be felt worldwide.

1993

Bill Clinton (D.), “the boy from Hope”, becomes the 42nd president of the U.S. – He will succeed in reducing the budget deficit, but his social reforms do not come to much.

After the catastrophe of an American task force in Mogadishu (Somalia), America asks itself if interventions in crisis regions are worth the sacrifices.

2001

George W. Bush (R.): The 43rd president steers a conservative course both in interior and foreign politics.

At the stock exchange, the “dot-com bubble” bursts, shattering the confidence in the “new markets”.

The shock of 9/11 (i.e. September 11th: Islamic extremists strike at the World Trade Center and other symbols of America's power and pride. The Bush administration declares a war on terrorism, the first target of which will be the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which is suspected of harboring the al-Qaida network of terrorists inspired by Bin-Laden.

2003

The invasion of Iraq topples Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, but the alleged reasons for the war (weapons of mass destruction, terrorism) remain questionable, and the implementation of democracy proves a difficult task. Both in the war and in its aftermath the role of the media evokes scepticism.

2008

The collapse of the U.S. finance system and the ensuing economic crisis shatter the confidence in free markets.

2009

Yet there is new hope: Barack Obama becomes the 44th President of the U.S. - the first non-white incumbent.