

# This land is my land



## The US

The United States consists of 48 contiguous states and the two non-contiguous states of Alaska and Hawaii. In addition, the United States includes a number of outlying areas, such as the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands of the United States, located in the Caribbean Sea, and the islands of American Samoa and Guam, located in the Pacific Ocean. The national capital, Washington DC, is located along the banks of the Potomac River between the states of Maryland and Virginia.

## Country profile

<b>OFFICIAL NAME</b> United States of America
<b>FORM OF GOVERNMENT</b> federal republic with two legislative houses (Senate – 100 senators; House of Representatives – 435 congressmen or congresswomen)
<b>HEAD OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT</b> president
<b>CAPITAL</b> Washington, DC*
<b>OFFICIAL LANGUAGE</b> none
<b>OFFICIAL RELIGION</b> none
<b>MONETARY UNIT</b> dollar (US \$)

## Geography basics

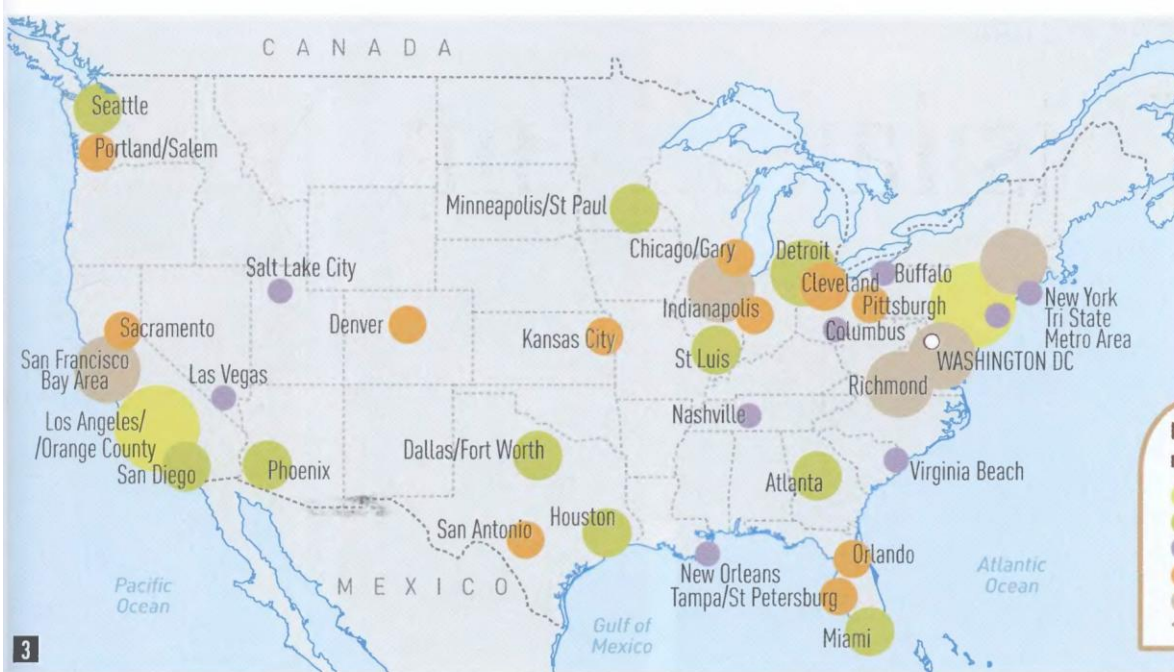
The Appalachian 1. .... divide the eastern seaboard from the Great 2. .... and the grasslands of the Midwest. The Mississippi-Missouri 3. ...., the world's fourth longest river system, runs mainly north to south through the heart of the country. The flat, fertile prairie of the Great 4. .... stretches to the west, interrupted by a highland region in the southeast. The Rocky Mountains, at the western edge of the Great Plains, extend north to south across the country. Farther west are the rocky Great Basin and 5. ....

such as the Mojave. Death 6. .... in the Mojave desert, at 85.5 m (282 ft) below sea level, with an average rainfall of about 50 mm and temperatures of 122 °F (50 °C) or higher, is the lowest, hottest and driest place in the country. The Sierra Nevada and Cascade Mountain ranges run parallel to the Pacific 7. .... At 20,320 feet (6,194 m), Alaska's Mount McKinley is the country's tallest peak. Active 8. .... are common throughout Alaska's Alexander and Aleutian Islands, and Hawaii consists of volcanic 9. ....



Tropical & Subtropical Moist Broadleaf Forests	Tundra
Tropical & Subtropical Dry Broadleaf Forests	Boreal Forests/Taiga
Tropical & Subtropical Coniferous Forests	Temperate Grasslands, Savana
Temperate Broadleaf & Mixed Forests	Flooded Grassland & Savana
Temperate Conifer Forests	Mediterranean Forests, Woods
	Deserts & Xeric Shrublands





## A diverse population

The population of the United States\* reached 305,600,000 at the end of 2008, according to the US Census Bureau. The US is the third most populous nation in the world, after China and India. Its population growth rate is 0.89%, compared to the European Union's 0.16%. About 79% of Americans live in urban areas and about half of those reside in cities with populations over 50,000.

The United States contains a highly diverse population; its diversity has to a great degree come from an immense and sustained global immigration. Possibly no other country has as wide a range of racial, ethnic, and cultural types as the United States.



'I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas [...]. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on earth is my story even possible.'

■ Barack Hussein Obama

## A varied environment

The major characteristic of the United States is probably its great variety. Its physical environment ranges from the Arctic to the subtropical, from the moist rain forest to the arid desert, from the rugged mountain peak to the flat prairie. Many biomes are scattered across the United States. A biome is a large community of plants and animals that occupies a distinct region. Terrestrial biomes, typically defined by their climate and dominant vegetation, include grassland, tundra, desert, tropical rain forest, and deciduous and coniferous forests.

## Tornado!

The United States gets an average of 1,000 tornadoes each year. A tornado is a violent, column-like system of rapidly-rotating air that is in contact with the ground. Most tornadoes are funnel-shaped. Although tornadoes are short-lived (they usually last for a few minutes), they can be very destructive and even deadly. Tornado Alley is a colloquial term most often used in reference to the area between the Rocky Mountains and Appalachian Mountains in which tornadoes are most frequent.

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. EP READ AND COMPLETE

Read the text *Geography basics* and complete with the following words.

- River
- deserts
- Mountains
- volcanoes
- Valley
- islands
- Lakes
- coast
- Plains

### 2. EP READ AND COMPLETE

Read the passages about the US, environment, tornadoes and population. Complete the following sentences.

- Alaska and Hawaii are .....
- Puerto Rico is .....
- A biome is .....
- A biome is defined by .....
- A tornado is .....
- Tornadoes can be .....
- Tornado Alley is .....
- The population of the US is about .....

- The population growth rate of the US is .....

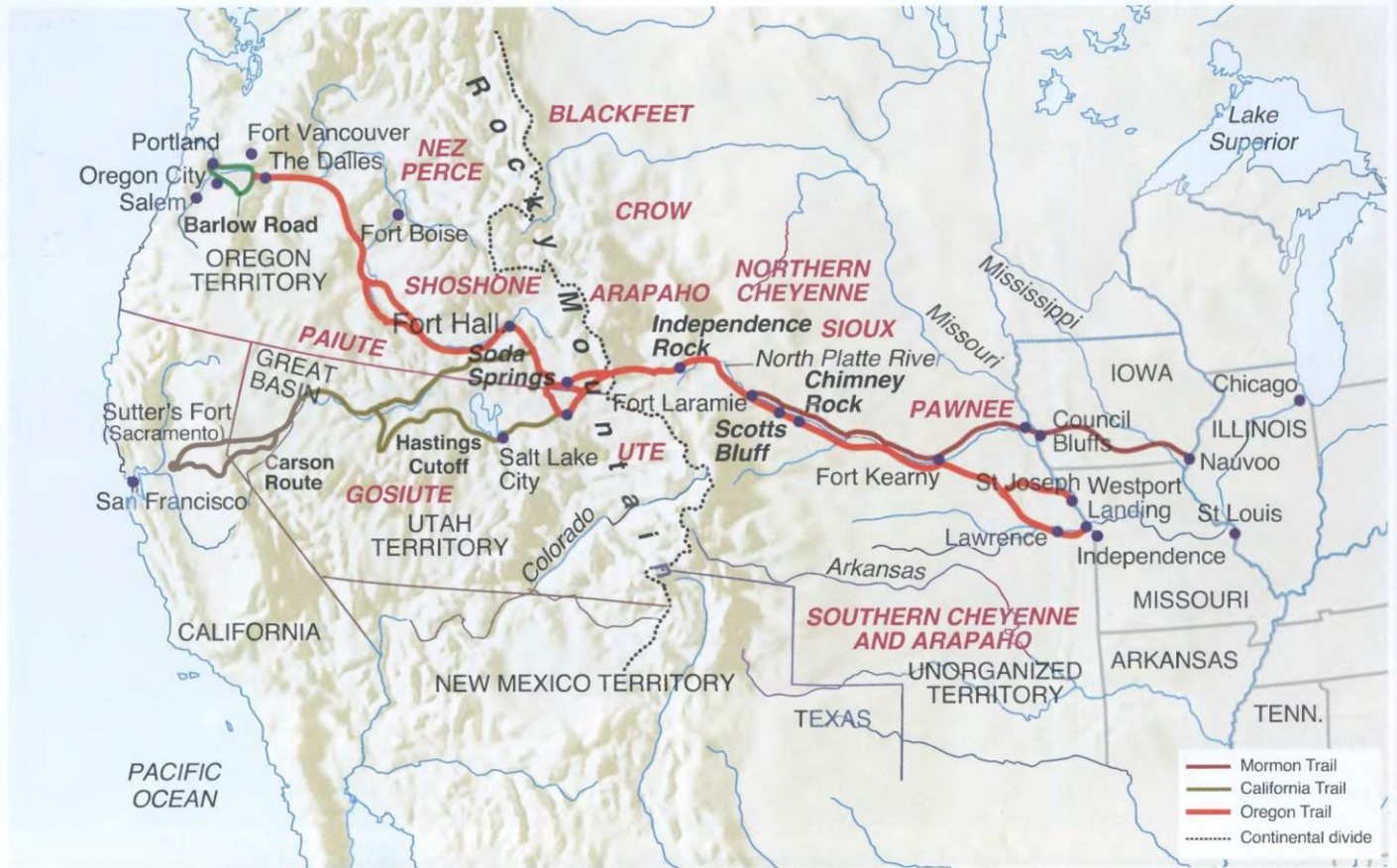
- About 79% of Americans .....

### 3. READ, CHOOSE AND WRITE

Read the texts again and the maps on these pages and decide if the following sentences are true **T** or false **F**. Then write six similar sentences to test your partner's knowledge.

- Las Vegas has a bigger population than Seattle. **T F**
- The Great Plains stretch to the west. **T F**
- Washington State is mainly covered with grasslands. **T F**
- Lake Superior is the furthest north of the Great Lakes. **T F**
- Hawaii consists of volcanic islands. **T F**
- Colorado has a humid climate. **T F**

# Manifest destiny



William Tylee Ranney\* ▶  
*Advice on the Prairie,*

1853, oil on canvas, private collection. In the 1840s one of the greatest voluntary migrations in history started and approximately 300,000 emigrants, the 'pioneers', made the trip to the rich lands of Oregon.

The journey along the Oregon Trail was 2,000 mile long and lasted six months. The pioneers usually travelled in covered wagons pulled by oxen.



## The growth of the US

In less than a century after the American Revolution the US grew from a small nation into one of the largest countries in the world. As the US expanded its territory across the continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, thousands of Americans moved to new lands west of the Missouri River which became known as the 'frontier'.

## Native Americans

Indians were the first Americans. They had populated the continent for thousands of years before the European settlers came. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century about two million people lived in North America, speaking about 300 different languages. The Indians adapted to very diverse local conditions, so they evolved different techniques of survival. On the Great Plains they were nomads and moved from place to place hunting the buffalo. In the Arctic region they hunted the seal and the caribou. Despite their cultural differences the Indians have always had one thing in common: a deep and strong bond with their homelands.

Taos Pueblo, New Mexico. ▶

In the dry south west, native Americans lived in brick villages or 'pueblos' and were farmers.



The migration west of thousands of 'white people' expelled the Indians from their lands. It also nearly destroyed all the buffalo that were the main source of food for the tribes of the Great Plains. The government sent soldiers and compelled the Indians to live on 'reservations'. These were pieces of land set aside by the US government for Indian tribes to live on. Most of the times reservations were dry and rocky areas that nobody wanted. The Indians fought back and inflicted some defeats on the American soldiers. At 'The Battle of Little Big Horn' Sioux and Cheyenne warriors defeated the troops of General Custer in 1876. But this was the last victory. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Indians had nothing left except the reservations.



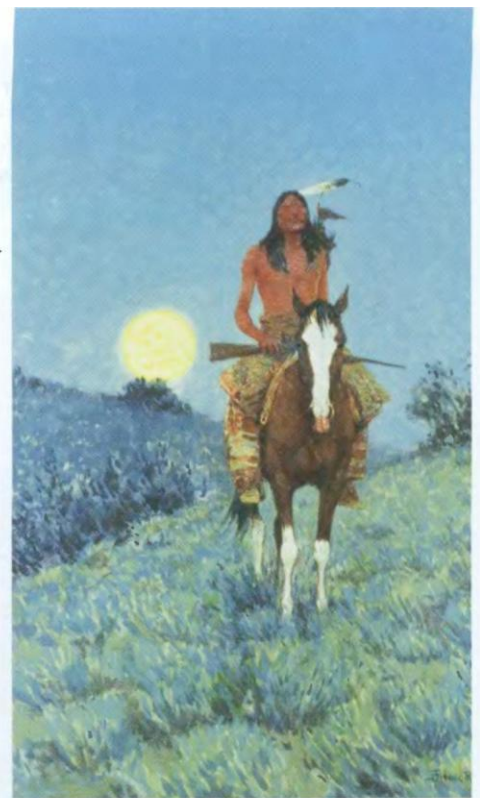
In 1838, moved on by the guns of federal troops and state militia, the Cherokee tribe made their trek to the dry plains of Oklahoma. Thousands of Cherokees died from the brutal conditions in which they found themselves. They called this the 'Trail of Tears'.

## Manifest destiny: the philosophy that shaped a nation

Some people came to think that America's rapid and successful expansion was due to a *manifest destiny*. This meant that America had unique rights, even obligations, to spread its superior culture among other people. Inevitably such notions both rationalized and encouraged continental expansion. '[...] Yes, we are the nation of progress, of individual freedom, of universal enfranchisement\*. [...] We must onward to the fulfilment of our mission – to the entire development of the principle of our organization – freedom of conscience, freedom of person, freedom of trade and business pursuits, universality of freedom and equality. This is our high destiny, and [...] we must accomplish it. All this will be our future history, to establish on earth the moral dignity and salvation of man – the immutable truth and beneficence of God. For this blessed mission to the nations of the world, which are shut out from the life-giving light of truth, has America been chosen; and her high example shall [...] carry the glad tidings of peace and goodwill where myriads now endure an existence scarcely more enviable than that of beasts of the field. Who, then, can doubt that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity?'

■ J.L. O'Sullivan, *The Great Nation of Futurity*, 1839

**Frederic Remington\*** ►  
*Outlier*, 1909,  
oil on canvas,  
The Brooklyn Museum,  
New York, US.



## ACTIVITIES

### 1. EP READ AND CHOOSE

Read *The growth of the US, Native Americans* and the captions. Then read the following summary and choose the correct answer.

In the **1.** 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century the US expanded its territory from the **2.** Pacific/Atlantic coast to the **3.** Pacific/Atlantic coast of the American continent. Thousands of **4.** emigrants/Indians migrated to the rich lands beyond the **5.** Oregon/Missouri River called the **6.** Trail of Tears/Frontier. These lands were populated by the **7.** native Americans/buffalo who had lived on the continent for thousands of years. The migration **8.** east/west of the white people forced the Indians from their lands and destroyed most of the **9.** buffalo/tribes that were the main source of food for the Indians of the **10.** Great Plains/north west. An episode which became known as the 'Trail of Tears' was the removal of the **11.** Cherokee/Cheyenne tribes to Oklahoma. The US government compelled the Indians to live on **12.** reservations/the Great Plains.

### 2. READ AND COMPLETE

Read *Manifest destiny*, then complete the sentences in your own words to summarize the philosophy underlying the document.

- America is .....
- America's principles are .....
- America shall .....
- America's mission is .....
- America's destiny is .....