

Batna2 University
Department of English

Level: 1st Year LMD

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Course: CCL

III. Geography of the United States of America

Introduction

The United States of America is the world's third largest country in size and nearly the third largest in terms of population. Located in North America, the country is bordered on the west by the Pacific Ocean and to the east by the Atlantic Ocean. Along the northern border is Canada and the southern border is Mexico. There are 50 states and the District of Columbia.

1. General Description of the Land and People

More than twice the size of the European Union, the United States has high mountains in the West and a vast central plain. The lowest point in the country is in Death Valley which is at -282 feet (-86 meters) and the highest peak is Denali (Mt. McKinley) at 20,320 feet (6,198 meters).

The country is divided into six regions: New England, the mid-Atlantic, the South, the Midwest, the Southwest, and the West. European settlers came to New England in search of religious freedom. These states are Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

The mid-Atlantic region includes Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and the city of Washington, D.C. These industrial areas attracted millions of European immigrants and gave rise to some of the East Coast's largest cities: New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia.

The South includes Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia, all of which struggled after the Civil War, which lasted from 1860-1865.

The Midwest is home to the country's agricultural base and is called the "nation's breadbasket." The region comprises the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

The American West, home of rolling plains and the cowboy, is a symbol of the pioneering spirit of the United States. The West is diverse, ranging from endless wilderness to barren desert, coral reefs to Arctic tundra, Hollywood to Yellowstone. The states of the West include Alaska, Colorado, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. 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.

The United States contains a highly diverse population. Unlike a country such as China that largely incorporated indigenous peoples, the United States has a diversity that to a great degree has come from an immense global immigration. Probably no other country has a wider range of racial, ethnic, and cultural types than does the United States.

In addition to the presence of surviving Native Americans and the descendants of Africans taken as slaves to the New World, the national character has been enriched by the tens of millions of immigrants who by and large have come to America hoping for greater social, political, and economic opportunities than they had in the places they left. (It should be noted that although the terms “America” and “Americans” are often used as synonyms for the United States and its citizens, respectively, they are also used in a broader sense for North, South, and Central America collectively and their citizens.)



2. Physiographic Divisions

The eastern United States has a varied topography. A broad, flat coastal plain lines the Atlantic and Gulf shores from the Texas-Mexico border to New York City and includes the Florida peninsula. This broad coastal plain and barrier islands make up the widest and longest beaches in the United States, much of it composed of soft, white sands. Areas further inland feature rolling hills, mountains, and a diverse collection of temperate and subtropical moist and wet forests.

The Appalachian Mountains form a line of low mountains separating the eastern seaboard from the Great Lakes and the Mississippi Basin. New England features rocky seacoasts and rugged mountains with peaks up to 6200 feet and valleys dotted with rivers and streams. The five Great Lakes are located in the north-central portion of the country, four of them forming part of the border with Canada, only Lake Michigan situated entirely within United States.

The southeast United States, generally stretching from the Ohio River on south, includes a variety of warm temperate and subtropical moist and wet forests, as well as warm temperate and subtropical dry forests nearer the Great Plains in the west of the region.

West of the Appalachians lies the Mississippi River basin and two large eastern tributaries, the Ohio River and the Tennessee River. The Ohio and Tennessee Valleys and the Midwest consist largely of rolling hills, interior highlands and small mountains. The Midwest also has a vast amount of cave systems.

The Great Plains lie west of the Mississippi River and east of the Rocky Mountains. A large portion of the country's agricultural products are grown in the Great Plains. Before their general conversion to farmland, the Great Plains were noted for their extensive grasslands. The Great Plains come to an abrupt end at the Rocky Mountains.

The Rocky Mountains form a large portion of the Western U.S., entering from Canada and stretching nearly to Mexico. The Rocky Mountain region is the highest region of the United States by average elevation. The highest peaks of the Rockies are found in Colorado, the tallest peak being Mount Elbert at 14,440 ft (4,400 m). In addition, instead of being one generally continuous and solid mountain range, it is broken up into a number of smaller, intermittent mountain ranges, forming a large series of basins and valleys.

West of the Rocky Mountains lies the Intermontane Plateaus (also known as the Intermountain West), a large, arid desert lying between the Rockies and the Cascades and Sierra Nevada ranges. The Southwest is predominantly a low-lying desert region. A portion known as the Colorado Plateau is considered to have some of the most spectacular scenery in the world. It is accentuated in such national parks as Grand Canyon among others.

The Intermontane Plateaus come to an end at the Cascade Range and the Sierra Nevada. The Cascades consist of volcanic mountains, many rising prominently from the surrounding landscape. The Sierra Nevada, further south, is a high, rugged, and dense mountain range. It contains the highest point in the contiguous 48 states, Mount Whitney (14,505 ft or 4,421 m). West of the Cascades and Sierra Nevada is a series of valleys, such as the Central Valley in California and the Willamette Valley in Oregon. Along the coast is a series of low mountain ranges known as the Pacific Coast Ranges.



3. Climate

Due to its large size and wide range of geographic features, the United States contains examples of nearly every global climate. The climate is subtropical in the Southern United States, tropical in Hawaii and southern Florida, polar in Alaska, semiarid in the Great Plains west of the 100th meridian, Mediterranean in coastal California and arid in the Great Basin and the Southwest.

4. Natural Disasters

The United States is affected by a variety of natural disasters yearly. Although drought is rare, it has occasionally caused major disruption, such as during the Dust Bowl (1931–1942). Farmland failed throughout the Plains, entire regions were virtually depopulated, and dust storms ravaged the land.

4.1. Tornadoes and Hurricanes

The Great Plains and Midwest see frequent severe thunderstorms and tornado outbreaks during spring and summer with around 1,000 tornadoes occurring each year. Hurricanes are another natural disaster found in the US, which can hit anywhere along the Gulf Coast or the Atlantic Coast as well as Hawaii in the Pacific Ocean. Particularly at risk are the central and

southern Texas coasts, the area from southeastern Florida, and the Outer Banks of North Carolina, although any portion of the coast could be struck.

Hurricane season runs from June 1 to November 30, with a peak from mid-August through early October. Some of the more devastating hurricanes have included the Galveston Hurricane of 1900, Hurricane Andrew in 1992, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

4.2. Flooding

Occasional severe flooding is experienced. There was the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, the Great Flood of 1993, and widespread flooding and mudslides caused by the 1982–83 El Niño event in the western United States. Flooding is still prevalent, mostly on the Eastern Coast, during hurricanes or other inclement weather, for example in 2012, when Hurricane Sandy devastated the region. Localized flooding can, however, occur anywhere, and mudslides from heavy rain can cause problems in any mountainous area, particularly the Southwest.

4.3. Volcanoes

The West Coast of the continental United States makes up part of the Pacific Ring of Fire, an area of heavy tectonic and volcanic activity that is the source of 90% of the world's earthquakes. The American Northwest sees the highest concentration of active volcanoes in the United States, in Washington, Oregon and northern California along the Cascade Mountains. There are several active volcanoes located in the islands of Hawaii, including Kilauea in ongoing eruption since 1983, but they do not typically adversely affect the inhabitants of the islands. There has not been a major life-threatening eruption on the Hawaiian Islands since the 17th century. Volcanic eruptions can occasionally be devastating, such as in the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens in Washington.

4.4. Other Natural Disasters

Other natural disasters include tsunamis around Pacific Basin, mud slides in California, and forest fires in the western half of the contiguous U.S. Although drought is relatively rare, it has occasionally caused major economic and social disruption, such as during the Dust Bowl (1931–1942), which resulted in widespread crop failures and dust storms, beginning in the southern Great Plains and reaching to the Atlantic Ocean.

Conclusion

The United States is relatively young by world standards, being less than 250 years old; it achieved its current size only in the mid-20th century. America was the first of the European colonies to separate successfully from its motherland, and it was the first nation to be established on the premise that sovereignty rests with its citizens and not with the government.