

Faculty of Letters and Languages – M’sila

Department of English

Level: Second year license

Course: American Civilisation

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Lecture Two: The Country and the People: (Settlement and Immigration)

INTRODUCTION:

With an area of 9.363.123 square kilometers the United States is exceeded in size only by Russia, Canada and China. Of the fifty states, forty-eight lie between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and between Canada and Mexico, while two, Alaska and Hawaii, lie in the north-west corner of the continent and the Pacific Ocean, respectively. Island possessions in the Caribbean and the Pacific add another 17.600 kilometers to American territory.

I-The Country:

The Political Geography of the United States:

The United States of America is a federal republic consisting of 50 states, a federal district (Washington, D.C., the capital city of the United States), five major territories, and various minor islands. The 48 contiguous states and Washington, D.C., are in central North America between Canada and Mexico; the two other states, Alaska and Hawaii, are in the northwestern part of North America and an archipelago in the mid-Pacific, respectively, while the territories are scattered throughout the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.

1-STATES

States are the primary subdivisions of the United States, and possess a number of powers and rights under the United States Constitution, such as regulating intrastate commerce, running elections, creating local governments, and ratifying constitutional amendments. Each state has its own constitution, grounded in republican principles, and government, consisting of three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. All states and their residents are represented in the federal Congress, a bicameral legislature consisting of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Each state is represented by two Senators, while Representatives are distributed among the states in proportion to the most recent constitutionally mandated decennial (each 10 years) **census**. Additionally, each state is entitled to select a number of electors to vote in the Electoral College, the body that elects the President of the United States, equal to the total of Representatives and Senators in Congress from that state.

2-TERRITORIES:

In addition to the 50 states and federal district, the United States has **sovereignty** over 14 territories. Five of them (American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) have a permanent, nonmilitary population, while nine of them do not. With the exception of Navassa Island, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which are located in the Caribbean, all territories are located in the Pacific Ocean.

3-AMERICAN-“INDIAN” RESERVATIONS:

An Indian reservation is a legal designation for an area of land managed by a federally recognized Native American tribe. The collective geographical area of all reservations is 227,000 km², approximately the size of Idaho, and larger than England. While most reservations are small compared to U.S. states, there are 12 Indian reservations larger than the state of Rhode Island. The largest reservation, the **Navajo Nation Reservation**, is similar in size to West Virginia.

II-The People: Settlement and Immigration

Immigration is a central aspect of US history. It is a major reason that the nation's total population grew to 326 million by 2018. Believing in the American Dream, many tens of millions of people have come to live in the USA. They thus changed their homelands, America and their family histories forever. They strengthened the nation's commitment to ‘the dream’ and to its ideal of being a refuge for the poor and oppressed, a nation of nations. Gradually, over the centuries of massive immigration and the struggles of newcomers and Americans to adjust to each other, the view that the nature of the nation was and should be a composite of many national backgrounds, races and cultures gained popular acceptance. This view continues to face the opposition of those who believe newcomers should leave their homeland cultures behind and the dilemma of deciding what is necessary to hold the country and its increasingly diverse population together. **Emma Lazarus**, a poet, once wrote on the Statue of Liberty:

“Cries she with silent lips. ‘Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost, to me,’
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!’

Despite these warm welcoming feelings, the meetings of newcomers and native-born have also contributed to America's history of social disorder. The contacts, conflicts and mixing of cultures have fueled widespread discrimination, economic exploitation, anti-foreign movements and debates over equality, opportunity and national identity. In a country whose history began with the meeting of Native Americans and European colonists and continued through the importation of African slaves and several waves of immigrants, there has never been a single national culture.

Early Encounters of Europeans and Native Americans:

When European explorers and settlers encountered Native Americans in the late 1400s, a long history of mutual incomprehension and conflict began. These encounters amounted to a collision of worlds. Contacts between the Americas and other continents had been so rare that plants, animals, diseases and human societies evolved into different forms in the 'new' and the 'old' worlds. Europeans and Native Americans caught diseases from each other. Europeans survived the first contacts better, but for most of the seventeenth century well over half of them died from difficulties in adjusting to the new environment. The Native Americans fared far worse: epidemics annihilated entire native cultures. North America's pre-Columbian population of 5 million shrank to between 1 and 2 million.

The Founders:

The people who established the colonies are considered founders rather than immigrants because they created the customs, laws and institutions to which later arrivals (the first immigrants) had to adjust. The Spanish occupied coastal Florida, the south-west and California in the 1500s and 1600s. After trying to enslave the natives, they worked to convert them to Christianity, farming and sheep-herding. Because many natives rejected this way of life, the Spanish colonies faced border attacks for over 200 years. The English established their first permanent settlement at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. Their monarch had no desire to rule distant colonies, so instead the Crown legalized companies that undertook the colonization of America as private commercial enterprises. Virginia's early residents were so preoccupied with a vain search for gold and a sea passage to Asian markets that the colony failed until tobacco provided a profitable export. Because of the scarcity of plantation labor, in 1619 the first African laborers were imported as indentured servants (free people who contracted for 5 to 7 years of servitude). Supported by tobacco profits, however, Virginia imported 1.500 free laborers a year

by the 1680s and had a population of 75.000 white Americans and 10.000 Africans in hereditary slavery by 1700.

The first wave: colonial immigration, 1680-1776

The founders had come for economic gain and religious freedom, but their descendants gave the first large wave of European newcomers a warm welcome only if they were willing to conform to Anglo-American culture and supply needed labor. The reception that immigrants received varied according to location and the individual's qualities, from the extremes of largely hostile New England, to the more tolerant, diverse middle colonies. It was with mixed rural New York settlements of north-west Europeans in mind that **St. Jean de Crèvecoeur**, an immigrant farmer from France, first stated in 1782 the idea that in America '**individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of man**'. The only people who mixed in his vision, however, were north-west Europeans, and he required that the people in this first version of the melting pot had to turn their backs on their homeland cultures.

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Exercises:

1-Explain and examine the significance of the following names and terms:

Census - Sovereignty - Reservations - Territories - The Founders - Immigrants - Slaves - Servitude.

2-In a short paragraph discuss **the nature** of the early encounters between Native Americans and the first Europeans.

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Classroom Activity: Early Encounters of Europeans and Native Americans

Historians Peter Carroll and David Noble describe the first encounter between Europeans and the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas:

[On] an otherwise ordinary autumn day shortly after sunrise, the Arawak inhabitants of the Caribbean Islands noticed strange ships sailing on the horizon, much larger than their dugout canoes. As these ships moved closer and closer, they saw strange-looking people with light skins aboard, making odd gestures. The Arawak youths stood at the banks hesitantly, and then some of the braver men began swimming toward the mysterious boats.

These strangers offered the Arawak red-colored caps, glass beads, and other curious trifles. In exchange, the Arawak brought parrots, cotton skeins, darts, and other items. Then the strangers drew out swords, which the Arawak, in ignorance, grasped by the blades, cutting themselves. It was a symbolic act, this inadvertent drawing of blood. For the Arawak and the strangers looked at the world from opposite angles, and both were fascinated by what the other was not.

To the Arawak, the newcomers were so obviously different in language, dress, and color that the Arawak doubted that the Europeans were human beings. “They believe very firmly,” wrote Christopher Columbus after his first voyage to the Americas, “that I, with these ships and people, came from the sky.” Other Indigenous Peoples reacted in similar ways to their first encounters with Europeans.

Columbus and other Europeans had their own misconceptions. They mistakenly believed that the Arawak were “Indians.” Carroll and Noble write:

This misconception originated in Columbus’s basic error (which he himself never realized) in thinking that in sailing westward from Europe he had reached the Indies [in Asia], which were the true object of his voyage. To Columbus, it was literally inconceivable that he had found previously unknown lands. Like other Europeans of his time, he believed firmly in the completeness of human knowledge. What he saw, therefore, he incorporated into his existing worldview, and the Native Americans thereby became, to the satisfaction of most Europeans, simply Indians.

In describing the “Indians,” Europeans focused not on who they were but on who they were not. They then went on to describe what the Indigenous Peoples did not have. Amerigo Vespucci, for whom the Americas are named, described the “Indians” as neither Muslims nor Jews. He noted that they were “worse than heathen; because we did not see that they offered any sacrifice, nor yet did they have a house of prayer.” Colonial leaders warned that colonists must strictly adhere to the laws and moral guidelines that defined their communities; otherwise they would allow themselves to become “Indianized.” Increasingly, “to be ‘Indianized’ meant to serve the Devil.” It also meant to be “decivilized, to become wild men.” After all, the English viewed “Indians” as people living outside of “civilization.”

➤ **Write a paragraph in which you answer the following questions:**

- ✚ What misconceptions did Columbus and other Europeans have about the Indigenous Peoples they encountered? What effect did these misconceptions have on how Europeans and Indigenous Peoples thought about each other?

- The United States of America Map -



- The American Territories Map -

