



The United States

The most important fact about the United States is that it is very large. It is not one country in the European sense, but a Union of fifty very different States, each with its own internal laws. Many of the states are larger in area than whole countries in Europe.

America has great sandy deserts, where distances are so vast and the air so clear that cattle can be seen grazing eight or ten miles away, looking like mice. Encircling the deserts and never too far away are some of the world's most brilliantly- coloured mountains whose peaks are covered with eternal snows. The main mountain ranges are the Rocky Mountains, the Appalachians, Sierra Nevada and the Alaskan Range. Cities and towns are often hundreds of miles apart. On arriving in New York the traveller from Europe is still only half-way to Hollywood, and before he has completed a journey to California he will have to put his watch back three times more. The surface of the five Great Lakes along the north-eastern border – Lake Superior, Lake Huron, Lake Michigan, Lake Erie and Lake Ontario – would cover the whole area of Italy and the Mississippi-Missouri is nine times as long as the Po.

Within its borders America has almost every type of climate. Winter in Maine, in the extreme north-east, or on the plains of North Dakota or Nebraska, is not very different from winter on the steppes of Russia. The hot summers in Mississippi or even in Washington, the national capital, can be uncomfortably like those in Singapore. In the south, oranges and figs, cotton and tobacco grow readily. Vast forests cover the northern hills. Bears can still be hunted within a hundred miles of New York, and within sight of its towering skyscrapers it is still possible to be bitten by a snake.

Politically, America is both very young and quite old. Her framework of government is in large part inherited from seventeenth-century England and follows the pattern laid down by a small band of men and women who crossed the Atlantic in that century from Plymouth and founded a New England on the rocky shores of Cape Cod Bay. The United States gained independence from Britain after a War of Independence (1775-1783).

Though politically America is still a child of England, she is no longer so racially. Her people today are the sons and daughters of almost every race on earth. One American in every ten is black, the descendants in large part of the slaves brought over in the early days from Africa.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why can't the USA be considered one country in the European sense?
2. What are the main mountain ranges in the United States?
3. Which is the longest river in America?
4. What is the climate like?
5. When was the War of Independence?
6. Whose descendants are the present inhabitants of the country?



INTERNATIONAL HOUSE LA SPEZIA & SARZANA



The United States

Answer Key

1. Because it is a Union of fifty different states.
2. The Rocky Mountains, the Appalachians, Sierra Nevada and the Alaskan Range.
3. The Mississippi-Missouri.
4. The climate is very varied.
5. 1775-1783.
6. They are descendants of almost every race on earth.