

A Short Introduction to American History

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SAMANDRAG <p>This Notat comprises ten chapters on American history, from the early European settlements to the most recent developments in US foreign policy; the final chapter is devoted to the US political system. All chapters but the last are followed by a summary</p> <p>Attention has been given to topic-related films (fiction, biopics, historical epics) and several titles are mentioned at the end of most chapters.</p>		
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Foreword

This Notat comprises ten chapters on the history of North America, from the colonial period to the most recent developments in US foreign policy. These chapters were initially prepared, written and released as handouts for specific courses in the Civilisation class for Grunnfag, English Year Unit and English One & Two. They have been collected, revised, updated and expanded for the present volume.

The Notat follows roughly a chronological order, although some chapters go back to the colonial period and cover aspects of American history like the Indians or the African Americans from the coming of the first European settlers to the present day.

Each chapter but the last ends with a summary of the main points, but it is important to read the whole, as these summaries serve only as reminders of the key elements and cannot replace the chapters themselves.

Each topic is illustrated whenever possible by a list of films which are deemed relevant. These lists are necessarily non-exhaustive, all the more since US film industry is prolific and 'biopics' (short for biographical films), war dramas, adaptations of novels and plays, and historical epics have been produced for years – and still are. Most of these films are now available in DVD format.

Chapter One

From the first settlements to the War of Independence (1600 – 1783)

Early American history must be here understood as starting with the earliest European settlements in North America, from the 17th to the 18th century, up to 1783 (end of the War of Independence). The relationships between these Europeans and the Native Americans (or Indians) will be studied later. Obviously, American history did *not* begin with Columbus' so-called 'discovery' of a continent which had been reached by Norse explorers in the early years of the 11th century¹, but, more importantly, was populated with an estimated one and a half million of Native Americans, descendants of the immigrants who had arrived on the American continent from Siberia by way of the Bering Strait 30,000 years before...

During the first three centuries of European exploration and settlement in North America, American history is closely linked to English- and later British- history. Political events in England, especially in the 17th century, affected the history of the settlements, as well as English policies in Ireland and Scotland at that time and later.

Before the 17th century

England came to colonisation later than Spain and Portugal. In the 16th century, English sailors were exploring sea-routes to the North West (towards today's Canada) and the North East (beyond North Cape, towards Russia and Siberia). English fishermen were active in the fishing grounds off the coast of Newfoundland, but all attempts at establishing settlements on the coast of North America had come to little, if anything at all.

Under the reign of Elizabeth I, however, famous sailors like Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Francis Drake caused serious trouble to the Spanish and the Portuguese settlements in the Caribbean and Central America (inspiring later fiction novels of pirates and 'privateers' as well as films, featuring many famous actors, from Errol Flynn in the 1930s to Johnny Depp in the 21st century). At the end of Elizabeth's reign, England had built a powerful navy, defeated Spain, and was about to embark on a long colonial adventure.

The first settlements

By 1607, King James I of England (who was at the same time also King James V of Scotland) gave licence to the Virginia Company to establish a settlement in North America, where the first 'town' was called after him (Jamestown). Although the settlers found the conditions very difficult at first (they suffered from cold and hunger), they managed to survive, often with the help of friendly Indians, and they were able to start exporting tobacco to England.

Not all settlements started with a view to trading only. In the early years of the 17th century, some English Puritans had fled persecution at the hands of the Church of England (Anglican/Episcopalian) and taken refuge in the Calvinist Netherlands. But unhappy at gradually losing their culture in a Dutch environment, they left again, called at Plymouth in south-west England and, in 1620, founded another Plymouth in what would become the

¹ Leif Ericsson, leaving from the settlements of Greenland in 1003.

Massachusetts Bay colony, in the region soon to be known as New England. Trade with England may not have been as flourishing as Virginia's, since the climate in the north did not allow for the cultivation of sugar or tobacco and the products from New England may have been less in demand in the mother country. Another significant difference between these two colonies is their respective settlement pattern: while Virginia had scattered farms and plantations, New England by 1640 had already a few small towns. From the beginning of the history of white North America, differences between north and south can be observed and should be kept in mind when studying the American Civil War in the 19th century.

Other colonies were founded, either by newcomers from England and other European countries or by settlers already established on the American continent (Rhode Island, Connecticut, founded by Massachusetts settlers). Maryland was initially founded by an English Catholic aristocrat to serve as refuge for his co-religionists, although Protestant settlers were also welcome. Colonies in New England were markedly Puritan², but little by little, the colonies grew more tolerant in religious affairs and no religion became dominant; no Anglican bishop was established by the Church of England.

Despite their differences, all thirteen colonies had a certain number of common points:

- a type of colonisation by settlement (for different motives, often religious)
- all had to pay for their own costs
- all had their own local government, with a governor, a council (acting as the upper house) and an elected assembly (with varying types of electoral systems and voting rights)
- they paid few taxes to the King (of England and later of Great-Britain)
- all were mostly populated by emigrants from England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland, as well the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, German states, but also by forced emigrants from Africa, the black slaves who provided the colonies, especially in the South, with a cheap labour force; other forced emigrants were convicts from England/Britain, as well as political prisoners, especially Scots and Irish; many emigrants were 'indentured servants', i.e. people whose Atlantic passage was paid for by their pledging to work as servants for four years in America.

Furthermore, colonial trade was an English monopoly; it meant that all cargoes had to be carried on English-built, English-owned and English-manned ships. Some of the colonial products (cotton, tobacco, sugar, indigo) had to be exported first to England even if they were destined to another market, while most European goods for the American market had to be landed in England before being shipped across the Atlantic, which is known as the 'export/re-export' system.

The thirteen colonies, therefore, enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy in running their own affairs, certainly more than French, Dutch, Spanish or Portuguese colonies. But what led to the War of Independence was the question of territorial expansion, taxation and trade.

The way to independence

Between 1689 and 1763, France and England fought different wars in Europe but also on the American continent and in India. After years of a conflict which involved some of the Native Americans, notably the Hurons and Iroquois, Britain emerged victorious and put an end to

² This was the context of the witchcraft trials in Salem, colony of Massachusetts, in 1692, the setting for Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* (1952).

French colonial ambitions in North America by the Treaty of Paris (1763)³. The French settlers of Quebec and Nova-Scotia⁴, predominantly Roman Catholic, became British subjects.

American colonists in general were happy with being members of the British Empire and had fought alongside British soldiers against the French. But in the aftermath of the Treaty of Paris, they were increasingly at odds with the policies of the King's government on the following issues:

- westward expansion: the Crown tried to limit the settlers' encroachments on Indian lands; white expansion led to a revolt by Ottawa Chief Pontiac in 1763
- taxation: the Crown demanded that colonists should participate in paying for the costs of colonial administration and defence (keeping 10,000 British soldiers on American soil against any attack from the French or the Spaniards)
- trade: American trade was restricted to export to and import from Britain.

The King's chief minister, George Grenville, also decided that American colonists should pay taxes and duties and in 1765, the Parliament in London passed the 'Stamp Act', stipulating that revenues stamps were to be put on all sorts of official documents, plus newspapers and playing cards. But the colonists gathered in the so-called 'Stamp Act Congress', the first ever inter-colonial assembly in North America, and British goods were boycotted by American merchants. The Stamp Act was eventually repealed but the following 'Declaratory Act' (1766) asserted that the British Parliament had full authority to pass binding-laws in the colonies.

In the following years, the King's ministers tried to impose other duties and force the colonists to pay for the keeping of British garrisons (the New-York assembly having refused to pay for this expense, it was suspended). In 1768, most colonists adhered to the principle of 'no taxation without representation'⁵. In 1770, British soldiers opened fire on a crowd of Bostonians, killing five ('The Boston Massacre'). As a consequence, all duties were repealed, but that on tea, and colonial unrest seemed to calm down. In 1773 however, opposition to tea duties came to a climax when a party of colonists dressed as Indians came on board the tea-ships in Boston harbour and emptied their cargoes into the sea ('The Boston Tea-Party').

The King's government, however, decided not to reverse its policies and passed the 'Coercive Acts' on the colonies, especially against Massachusetts (1774). The colonies then united against the Acts and they assembled in 1774 for the first Continental Congress. Many American colonists, especially in Puritan New-England, were also worried by the Quebec Act which recognised the privileged position of the Roman Catholic Church among the French-speaking settlers of Quebec, as well as the continuation of the French legal system, where no trial by jury was provided.

³ This treaty also settled the question of the French presence in India. In both America and India, the French Crown kept a few possessions (a few islands off the coast of Newfoundland and in the Caribbean, trading-posts on the coast of India).

⁴ The French settlers called that part of North America 'Acadia'. They were deported in 1755 for refusing to take the oath of allegiance to the British Crown and this is known as 'Le grand dérangement', meaning 'The great trip', but also 'The great trouble'. Some eventually managed to come back, but several others reached the region around New Orleans ('La Nouvelle Orléans') and settled there. They called themselves 'Acadians', but the 'd' was pronounced more like 'dje' ('Acadjians'). With the gradual loss of the initial 'A', it became 'Cadjians' and later 'Cajuns'.

⁵ Film connoisseurs may have recognised the words spoken by Steve McQueen and James Garner in *The Great Escape* by John Sturges (1963), when they celebrate the Fourth of July (Independence Day) in the German stalag where they are held prisoners of war with their British and Commonwealth comrades-at-arms.

The Continental Congress was in favour of establishing a colonial government and raising a militia, as well as controlling taxes and trade. The King's minister, Lord North, promised that colonies paying for the cost of their own administration and contributing to imperial defence would not be taxed, but that promise came too late: the first shots of the war had been fired at Lexington in April 1775, when British soldiers tried to confiscate colonists' arms and ammunitions, suffering casualties in the ensuing fight.

The War of Independence

At the beginning of the conflict, most Americans were ready to fight for their rights but wished to remain within the British Empire, sending King George III an 'Olive Branch Petition' in 1775, asking for reconciliation. And yet Virginian George Washington was put in command of the Continental (American) Army of 20,000 men.

An American attempt at invading Canada failed, and the King confirmed his intention to use force against the rebellious colonies; he also laid an embargo on colonial trade. In his pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), the American Thomas Paine concluded that there were only two alternatives: submission or separation. The Continental Congress voted in favour of the latter and on 4 July, the Declaration of Independence was adopted. But not all Americans were favourable to independence: at least 30,000 loyalists fought with the British, and the conflict was also a civil war in many respects.

At first the British seemed to enjoy military and naval superiority, but the Americans used guerrilla tactics as well as their knowledge of the terrain. Furthermore, the British found it difficult to occupy all strategic strongholds, while they never managed to engage the enemy in sufficiently decisive battles to destroy its forces. After an offensive from British Canada with Indian support had failed, the Royal forces on that front surrendered to the Continental Army at Saratoga in 1777.

This success decided the French to help the Americans, mostly in order to try and regain their own lost colonial possessions in America and India. The Spanish and the Dutch, who had also been frustrated in their colonial ambitions by the British, joined the French, though they were not formerly allied to the Americans. But the war was not going all that well for the Continental Army, with soldiers deserting or mutinying, and French support did not materialise or become effective before 1781. As for the British, since they could not win the decision in the north, they turned their attention to the southern colonies (Georgia, North and South Carolinas, Virginia) but were unable to strike at the enemy effectively⁶. In 1781, with strong French support, the Americans forced British general Cornwallis to surrender at Yorktown. Britain's position was weakened, both in America and in Europe, and peace talks began in 1782, leading to the recognition of American independence by Britain in 1783. The American example became a source of inspiration for the French in 1789, as well as for the Irish and Britain was anxious to avoid yet another war of independence, which did not prevent the Irish to rebel in 1798 under the leadership of Wolfe Tone, only to fail in the same year.

France did not gain much from helping the Americans, as Britain managed to secure commercial agreements with the new state and the French did not, in fact, recover lost territories in North America, or their influence in India.

The boundaries of the United States extended north to the Great Lakes, south to the 31st parallel (marking the northern border of Spanish Florida) and west up to the eastern shore of the Mississippi. Approximately 100,000 loyalists left the United States for Canada, the Caribbean or Britain. The British remained present in the north and the north-west, the

⁶ This is the context for the film *The Patriot*, by Roland Emmerich (2000), with Mel Gibson. It seems that Emmerich has over-dramatised the actual fighting, as there is no evidence that British soldiers committed atrocities such as burning civilians alive. The film even sparked controversy between Britain and the US, but also attracted criticism from US film maker Spike Lee for its depiction of slavery.

Spanish in the south and the south-west, and, in theory at least, the west bank of the Mississippi was French; but the Americans were now free to run their own affairs and they were to turn their attention soon to their western frontier... Before addressing that issue however, there remained the question of what form of government the new state should adopt.

To summarise

The colonisation of North America and the Caribbean started in the 16th century, with the arrival of explorers, followed by settlers, mostly from Spain, the Netherlands, England and France. But the two major English settlements were founded in the early 17th century in Virginia (1607) and the future Massachusetts (1620). The settlers often came in order to grow profitable crops (tobacco, sugar, cotton, mostly in the southern colonies) for export to England, or because they were fleeing religious persecution, like Puritans in Massachusetts or Catholics in Maryland. Others crossed the Atlantic because they were deported as 'indentured labourers' or to be sold as slaves, the latter coming mostly from West Africa.

The economy and social organisation of the settlements varied from north to south, with the former more urbanised, its economy based on agriculture and farming and similar to England's, and the latter with a more scattered form of settlement and an almost exclusively agricultural economy (plantations). This difference is important to note in order to understand the gap which was to develop between these two regions.

Colonisation and settlement were often marked by violence and warfare, not only against the native peoples, but also between different groups of settlers, particularly between the Catholic French and the predominantly Protestant English (later British) and Dutch, both sides enlisting the support of various native peoples, with often tragic consequences. This conflict culminated in the 18th century, when the British defeated the French, who lost all their possessions but a few islands in what is now Canada.

In the 18th century, the thirteen British colonies were now organised with a limited form of local government, and were eager to expand to the west, even if it meant displacing or destroying the native peoples. Such expansion, however, was curtailed by the King of Britain, who protected the Indians. Furthermore, the colonists resented the fact that they had to pay for the upkeep of British troops on American soil, while not being consulted on financial matters decided exclusively by the Parliament in London. They were also irritated by restrictions imposed upon American trade.

In spite of initial negotiations with the King, the situation deteriorated to such an extent that armed conflict was inevitable. On 4 July 1776, the Continental Congress declared independence.

Not all colonists were in favour of rebellion, and several remained loyal to Britain. But in spite of initial success, the British were first defeated at Saratoga in 1777 and were later forced to surrender at Yorktown (1781), when the Americans started receiving military support from the French and the Spanish. Britain eventually recognised American independence in 1783 and remained an important trading partner for the young republic whose founders were now faced with the consolidation of the new state – or the new states?

A few films...

Captain Blood, by Michael Curtiz (1935); one in many 'swashbuckler' films with Errol Flynn; Captain Blood is an Irish doctor sold into slavery in the Caribbean for his political views; he turns into a pirate until he joins with the supporters of William of Orange at the end of the 17th century

Drums Along the Mohawk, by John Ford (1939); set during the War of Independence, the story of an American settler (Henry Fonda) and his wife, withstanding attacks from the British and their Indian allies

The Sea-Hawk, by Michael Curtiz (1940), with Errol Flynn; a typical Hollywood 'swashbuckler' film, on the naval rivalry between England and Spain in the 16th century.

The Unconquered, by Cecil B. De Mille (1947), with Gary Cooper and Paulette Godard; set during the colonial period, an evocation of the conflicts between Native Americans and white settlers

Revolution, by Hugh Hudson (1985), with Al Pacino, Donald Sutherland, Nastassja Kinski; set during the war of Independence, a very different vision from Emmerich's *The Patriot* (see below)

The Last of the Mohicans, by Michael Man (1992), with Daniel Day-Lewis, Madeleine Stowe, Wes Studi; screen adaptation of the novel by James Fenimore Cooper (1826), set in 1757, during the French and Indian War (1754-1763)

The Scarlet Letter, by Roland Joffé (1995, but there are earlier versions, in 1934, 1973 and 1979), with Demi Moore, Gary Oldman, Robert Duvall; screen adaptation of the novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1850), set in the Puritan Massachusetts Bay colony in 1666

The Crucible, by Nicholas Hytner (1996), with Daniel Day-Lewis, Wynona Ryder; screen adaptation of the play by Arthur Miller (1952); set during the Salem (Massachusetts colony) witchcraft trials in 1692

The Patriot, by Roland Emmerich (2000), with Mel Gibson, Joely Richardson; a rather controversial view of the War of Independence, but a good evocation of the warfare during the second half of the conflict in the southern colonies, in spite of depiction of extreme violence by the British

The New World, by Terrence Malick (2005); the film is set during the settlement of Virginia and tells the story of Captain John Smith and his Indian wife Pocahontas' (this story is also the topic of an animated film by Disney Studios in 1995)

Chapter Two

From Confederation to Federation: the American Constitution (1776-1791)

The War of Independence is also known as ‘The American Revolution’. Yet, as Maldwyn A. Jones points out, ‘It had none of the cataclysmic quality associated, say, with what happened in France in 1789 or in Russia in 1917.’⁷ It was a revolution in that the Americans rejected a colonial order but also established a republic inspired by new ideas and different from any other organised state at the time. If there were no spectacular social changes from colonial to independent America, the notion of hereditary privileges was alien to the young republic, and social mobility was encouraged by the expansion westward, giving more Americans the occasion to acquire land at the expense of the Indians.

The problem faced by the thirteen newly independent states, however, was linked to the nature of their new inter-state relationships and their future as a viable political entity. Already in 1783 divisions between north and south could be observed: while the northern states were more prompt to abolish slavery⁸, the southern states retained it, even if slave trade was abolished in some of them⁹.

Last, but not least of the characteristics of these new independent states, there was no official religion, even if the disestablishment of the puritan Congregationalist church took longer in New England than the separation between church and state in the south. This means that religious opinions were not, in theory at least, to affect civil capacities¹⁰. This religious freedom is also characteristic of the American Revolution.

One constitution per state

Under British rule, each colony had a ‘Royal charter’ which determined how the colony should be ruled. Only two of the former colonies simply revised these charters, while the eleven others drew up new constitutions and had them adopted by each state legislature, except in Massachusetts, where a specific convention was elected to devise a constitution and submit it to the electorate for approval. This procedure was to become standard for all future constitution-making in the new states of the US.

These constitutions were written, unlike in Britain, where the constitution is made up of unwritten conventions, ancient documents, legal texts and Statute Law (passed by

⁷ The French Revolution was marked by a period known as ‘La Terreur’ (i.e. ‘The Terror’), when opponents of radical republicans were guillotined, and the Republic was later replaced by the harsh dictatorship of Napoleon I. Similarly, the Russian Revolution was accompanied by a fierce repression of opposition and the Soviet Union was ruled ruthlessly by Joseph Stalin until 1953.

⁸ This did not mean an end to segregation for freed ex-slaves.

⁹ The abolition of the slave trade means that the importation of new slaves was forbidden, but slavery was still legal. Slave-owners were then careful to breed new slaves, i.e. to renew their slave work-force thanks to women-slaves giving birth, while illegal trade also continued.

¹⁰ But the US will have to wait until 1960 to see John F. Kennedy, a Roman Catholic, elected President, breaking the tradition of an office so far held by Protestants.

Parliament). In that sense too, the adoption of constitutions set down on one written document was revolutionary.

All ex-colonies adopted a form of government based on the former colonial models, themselves derived from the British political system, with an executive and a bi-cameral legislature (i.e. with two chambers)¹¹. Early state governors, however, had limited powers and the principle of ‘separation of powers’¹² was affirmed but not put in practice, with authority invested chiefly in the legislature, whose power was nevertheless limited by elections held each year and by bills of rights which guaranteed fundamental liberties familiar to Englishmen, like

freedom of expression, worship and assembly, the right to jury trial, protection against cruel and unusual punishments and against search warrants, the subordination of military to civil power. (Jones, 1995)

This system was not in fact very democratic, as only property-holders could exercise political rights and only the richest could qualify for public office. But representation was extended to more modest landowners, who thus started to play a public role.

The ‘Articles of Confederation’

In 1777, the Continental Congress appointed a ‘Committee of Thirteen’ (one representative per state) to elaborate a constitution for a central government, known as ‘The Articles of Confederation’. This government had limited powers: war, treaties and alliances, common expenses, coinage, post offices and Indian affairs, all other, non-specified powers resting with each individual state. It could not, however, decide on taxation and trade, the two key issues that had sparked the anti-British rebellion. There was no central executive or judiciary and in the first years after the end of the war, the Congress, made up of one single chamber where each state had one vote, had no fixed residence. Yet, it managed to legislate for the new territories of the North West, along the Ohio valley and further west¹³ towards the Great Lakes.

The newly-independent United States was still fragile and prone to secession or to threats from the British to the north or the Spanish to the south and south-west. The fact that Congress could not raise taxes or legislate on trade put the new republic at risk, while western settlers wanted a central government capable of dealing effectively with the Indians.

Towards Federation...

In 1786, five states decided to organise a ‘Federal Convention’ to be held the following year in order to discuss a new form of Federal government. All states but Rhode Island attended, with George Washington presiding. This was not just a revision of the Articles, but the drawing up of a new constitution. The issues for these delegates were the following:

- strengthening the central power without suppressing the power of each individual state
- keeping a just balance between the three branches of government (see note 12)
- agreeing on a fair representation for the thirteen states.

¹¹ It is easy to recognise the British political system, with the Monarch at the top and a Prime Minister as head of government, plus the House of Lords (upper house) and the House of Commons (lower house).

¹² This principle states that the three powers (executive, legislative and judiciary) should be separated, i.e. independent from each other.

¹³ The Northwest Territory was later divided into five states: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin.

The latter was possibly the most contentious issue: should the states be equally represented, i.e. 'one state, one vote', or should each state be represented according to its population, in which case 'Virginia, with 747,000 people [would have] twelve times as many representatives as Delaware, which had only 60,000' (Jones, 1995)? In the end, the solution adopted was that of a legislative bi-cameral (i.e. two-chamber) system. Congress was to consist of:

- the Senate (upper house), with each state equally represented, i.e. by two Senators per state
- the House of Representatives (lower house), with each state represented by a number of elected representatives proportional to its population.

Congress was given authority to legislate on trade and taxation, but the states retained part of their sovereignty.

Obviously not all thirteen states shared the same concerns and interests. It is important to remember that from this early period in the history of the USA, northern and southern states were opposed on a certain number of issues:

- 1) – the southern states wanted slaves to be counted in the population, thus ensuring a greater number of representatives in the House of Representatives, even though the slaves had no rights and were not free¹⁴; however, southern states did not want slaves to be considered as liable to taxation
- 2) – the northern states held the opposite view: if slaves were treated as pieces of property, they were not entitled to be counted for proportional representation but should be assessed for taxation
- 3) – the southern states were dependent on exports of their raw materials (cotton, sugar, tobacco, rice) and feared Congress would impose taxes on exported goods; they were therefore in favour of free-trade policies, in order to export for example cotton to Britain and the textile industry of Manchester at a competitive price
- 4) – the northern states, whose agricultural production was similar to that of European countries, could not compete on European markets; furthermore, they feared competition from British manufactured goods flooding the American markets and hampering the development of industries in the North; they were in favour of tariffs, or 'protection' of the American markets and American goods.

Compromise had to be reached and Congress could not impose taxes on export or abolish the slave trade for the coming twenty years. Two-thirds of the Senate's votes would be necessary to ratify a treaty (including on trade).

The federal government was to retain the powers it had under the Articles of Confederation, but could now also act on taxation and trade (with restrictions – see previous paragraph) and had sole authority on treaties. The Constitution, together with laws passed by the Federal government, was to be the supreme law of the land, superior to that of each state. The executive was to be the President, while the highest court of law for the land was to be the Supreme Court (established in 1789, with other federal courts). All three powers were to be subject to 'checks and balances' in order to keep them on equal footing. (Also see Chapter Ten).

After a ratification debate between Federalists (pro-Constitution) and Anti-Federalists (who argued in favour of a Bill of Rights to be added to the Constitution), the Constitution

¹⁴ Note that Native Americans were not included. Also note that voters were exclusively white male property owners.

was eventually ratified in 1788 and elections held in early 1789, giving a majority to the Federalists, with George Washington elected the first President of the USA.

One of the first significant political event of the newly-elected Congress was the adoption in 1791 of ten amendments to the Constitution, known as 'Bill of Rights', and guaranteeing basic rights and freedom for the individuals (religion, speech, assembly, press, petition, right to bear arms, protection against arbitrary arrest and search). The tenth amendment established that all powers but those delegated to the federal government should be reserved to the states.

It is quite clear that the Constitution was only adopted after reaching a compromise between partisans of a strong Federal government and partisans of powerful individual states. This issue, together with slavery and trade policies, was to remain a crucial one and should be kept in mind when studying westward expansion, as the question of slavery in territories and later new states was going to play a fundamental role in the political crisis preceding the Civil War (1861-1865).

When President Washington¹⁵ took office in 1789 in New York City, the temporary seat of government, he found himself at the head of a country of four millions, including 750,000 black people, all of them slaves but 60,000. It was in general a young population (50% under the age of 16) with an even number of men and women. In geographical terms, 50% of the population lived south of the Mason-Dixon Line¹⁶ (Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia), the other half in the three 'Middle States' (Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey) and New England (Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire). The USA was nevertheless still a young nation whose unity was fragile and financial situation precarious. Furthermore, the West (towards the Alleghenies, the Ohio valley and the east bank of the Mississippi) was still partly held by Indians (both indigenous to this region and refugees fleeing the whites in the East) and under the looming threat of Britain to the North, and Spain to the South and Southwest.

The tasks facing the new government were concerning the strengthening of the nation by extending its surface to the west, augmenting its population through birth and immigration and increasing its economic and military power, as well as improving its diplomatic standing with the European powers.

To summarise...

The War of Independence was fought over the issues of representation of the 13 colonies in London in order to discuss taxation, and of trade between the colonies and the rest of the world, as the colonists resented the restrictions imposed upon them by Britain.

The thirteen colonies, becoming the thirteen states, first agreed on a loose confederation whose central government was weak, while each state government had authority over most affairs.

In order to make the USA more powerful, partisans of a federal government (the 'Federalists') devised a new constitution, which was approved in 1788. A Bill of Rights was later added to the Constitution, with ten amendments. The principles of this constitution were (and still are to this day):

¹⁵ George Washington served two consecutive mandates as President, in 1789-1792 and 1792-1796.

¹⁶ The Mason-Dixon Line is the symbolical frontier between North and South in the eastern part of the USA. The line marks the border between Pennsylvania to the north and Maryland to the South. M.A. Jones includes Delaware in the Southern States, although it was to stay within the Union (the North) at the time of the Civil War.

1 – federalism: the US Constitution is the supreme law of the country, superior to state law; the 10th amendment (in the Bill of Rights), establishes the powers ‘reserved’ to each individual state and those ‘delegated’ to the federal government.

2 – separation of powers: ‘no person may serve in more than one branch at the same time’ (Mauk & Oakland, 2002); power cannot, in theory, be concentrated in one of the three powers; elections (of the President, of Senators, of Representatives) are held at different periods and terms of office are of different length

3 – checks and balances: the power of each branch is limited by ‘checks’ from the other two; for example, the President appoints federal judges, but their appointments must be approved by the Senate (also see Chapter Ten).

This new constitution had been devised to accommodate both smaller states (each state being given two seats in the Senate, irrespective of its population) and larger states (all states being represented according to their population in the House of Representatives). Differences remained, however, between northern states, slightly more urbanised, with a developing industry and a diversified agriculture (corn, cattle), and southern states, overwhelmingly rural, with an economy based on agriculture (often monoculture) and dependent upon foreign markets. While northern states tended to be anti-slavery, for moral but also economic reasons (being an unpaid workforce, therefore not consumers, slaves could hardly contribute to the development of domestic markets), southern states wanted to maintain slavery in order to keep production costs low and remain competitive when selling their products (notably cotton) to Europeans. Northern states hoped a federal government would take action in protecting trade, while southern states were in favour of free-trade and limited federal intervention...

Chapter Three

Westward Expansion (1790-1853)

George Washington served two consecutive mandates as the first President of the USA (1789-1796). As we saw in the previous chapter, he was faced with a series of problems inherent to the young Republic, not least financial, political and diplomatic. While the Secretary to the Treasury Alexander Hamilton managed to repay the foreign debt and create a national bank (The Bank of the United States, 1791), the strength of the new Federal government was demonstrated when a tax on liquor was passed and imposed by force to recalcitrant Pennsylvanians. This use of force, however, contributed to unite those Americans who were wary of a strong Federal power. They became known as ‘Republicans’¹⁷, while supporters of the Federal government were ‘Federalists’.

As for diplomacy, the US in the last decade of the 18th century was surrounded by European colonial possessions: the British in what is today Canada, the Spanish west of the Mississippi and south in Florida and today’s Alabama, and the French, who had kept a few islands off the coast of Newfoundland¹⁸ and in the Caribbean¹⁹ after the Treaty of Paris in 1763²⁰.

At the end of his second and last mandate, in 1796, Washington advised the Americans “to steer clear of permanent alliances with foreign nations” (quoted in Jones, 1995). He also ‘warned them against “the baneful effect of the spirit of party”, especially party divisions along geographical lines.’ (*ibid*). As a matter of fact, Washington’s words were prophetic, since the US was to be involved with other nations on the North American continent (Britain, Spain, France, later Mexico), while westward expansion was to play a role in the political division between an anti-slavery North and a pro-slavery South, culminating in the secession of the southern states in 1860-1861 and the Civil War (1861-1865).

Going West...

Western settlers were not lacking in numbers, but they were faced with a few obstacles on their way westward:

- 1) natural barriers: the Appalachian Mountains, stretching from what is today Nova Scotia in Canada in a south-westerly direction towards today’s Alabama, separate the Atlantic seaboard from the territories east of the Mississippi and the Missouri, along the Ohio Valley; there were no roads built yet to allow easy access...
- 2) the Indians, who had been at first ready to help the white newcomers, were less inclined to do so as they were decimated by illnesses brought by these whites or killed

¹⁷ The ‘Republicans’ of the late 18th century in the US have little to do with today’s Republican Party, whose present leader is George W. Bush.

¹⁸ St Pierre et Miquelon, at present French Overseas Territories.

¹⁹ Guadeloupe et Martinique, at present French Overseas Districts.

²⁰ Also see Chapter One.

by these settlers; refugees from tribes in the thirteen new states sought sanctuary along the Ohio valley, sometimes even displacing the local tribes

- 3) European powers, Britain and Spain, were strong enough to check any unwelcome move by the young American republic, whose army was small and ill-trained.

All this did not prevent emigrants and settlers to move across the Appalachian Mountains, calling the Federal government for help against Indians, whom the British and the Spanish often encouraged to attack Americans²¹. The Federal government was also trying very hard not to become embroiled in European conflicts spreading to America, as Britain was fighting against revolutionary- and later Napoleonic France from 1793 until 1815, while Spain, initially allied to Napoleon, then changed sides and became an ally of Britain.

The Louisiana Purchase

In 1803, Napoleon I had reclaimed the vast territory of Louisiana (from the west bank of the Mississippi to the foot of the Rocky Mountains) from the Spanish, who had been entrusted with its keeping. The French emperor had abandoned his colonial ambitions in North America and sold the Louisiana territory to the US, for an initial sum of \$ 15 millions, to which were added interests and other French financial claims, eventually reaching \$23,213,567.73²². This sum was the equivalent of twice 'the normal annual expenditure of the federal government' (Jones, 1995), but it was still a good bargain for the US, as the addition of Louisiana doubled the territory of the young Republic. This undeniable success contributed to the re-election of Jefferson²³ as President in 1804, which also saw the Lewis and Clark expedition from St Louis on the Missouri to the Pacific, via the Columbia River and the Rocky Mountains. The expedition brought back maps as well as scientific data on flora, fauna – and on the Indians.

The 1812 war with Britain

Animosity against Britain had flared up in 1811 as a result of a rebellion of Mississippi Indians under the leadership of Chief Tecumseh, supplied with rifles by the British. This had been preceded by several incidents involving both Britain and France, at war with each other and blockading each other's ports, but also confiscating American goods or even attacking American vessels. When Napoleon decided to abandon this policy in order to make things more difficult between America and its former colonial masters, and in the aftermath of the British-backed Tecumseh rebellion, war broke out in 1812.

The Americans attacked Canada (killing Tecumseh in the bargain) but did not manage to invade, especially after 1814, when British forces were released from Europe at the end of the Napoleonic wars. In the south however, US General Andrew Jackson defeated the British in New Orleans in 1815, both sides unaware that peace had been signed two weeks before, news not having crossed the Atlantic in time. Although both the British and the Americans had enjoyed a few military successes, the US had now demonstrated their ability to resist the greatest power on earth. From 1815, Britain and the US were to resort to negotiations, not to arms, in order to solve territorial disputes in North America. Furthermore, Jackson had definitely crushed the Indians east of the Mississippi, thus making white settlement easier.

²¹ Several Indian tribes had sided with the British against the Americans during the War of Independence, which did not endear them to the latter.

²² This sum is given in *The Great West* by David Lavender. Jones (1995) mentions only \$ 15 millions, and so does the unnamed contributor to *An Outline of American History*, distributed by the US Information Agency. The entry on Wikipedia gives \$ 11,250,000 as the initial price, plus \$ 3,750,000 of cancelled French debts (total: \$ 15 millions), ending in a total of \$ 23,213,568 with the interests.

²³ Thomas Jefferson served two terms as President, in 1800-1804 and 1804-1808.

Into the Floridas...

The Floridas, west and east, covered what is now the south coast of Mississippi and Alabama. The US had obtained control over part of west Florida, but east Florida, under a weakening Spanish control, had become a haven for outlaws and runaway slaves, while Seminole Indians attacked American settlements over the border. US President James Monroe²⁴ ordered General Jackson (see above) to invade Florida in 1817 and neutralise the Seminoles. Jackson went as far as to depose the Spanish governor and the US government left Spain with the following alternative: either assume effective control of Florida and keep the Seminoles under control, or cede Florida to the US. Since Spain was then losing its vast South American colonial empire, the latter option was chosen, Florida became a territory and eventually the 27th state to join the US (1845).

The Monroe doctrine

Emboldened by US success against the two remaining European colonial powers in North-, Central- and South America, President Monroe devised a foreign policy in 1823 which became known as 'the Monroe Doctrine', characterised by the following:

- 1) there was to be no further colonisation of American territories (North, Central, South) by European powers
- 2) any European intervention in American affairs (i.e. in states like the US or the former Spanish colonies, newly independent) would be considered as hostile by the US
- 3) the US would not interfere in European affairs, either in Europe or in the remaining European colonies in the Americas²⁵.

Although the US was not in a position to enforce such a policy with its still limited armed forces, the Monroe Doctrine was to be a major factor in US foreign policy well into the 20th century. In the early 19th however, Britain was the only military and naval power strong enough to protect the new republics of South America against an intervention by Spanish, French or even Austrian forces²⁶.

Developing transports

If turnpikes (i.e. toll roads) were built across the Appalachian Mountains (linking Maryland to Illinois in 1850), steamboats went into service on the rivers, the lakes and a network of newly-built canals. These canals (notably the Erie Canal, built between 1817 and 1825) facilitated emigration westward, but they also made possible the movement of goods from the north-west towards the ports of New England or the Mid-Atlantic states (New York in particular). Up to the building of the Erie Canal, most goods were shipped on the Ohio and the Mississippi down to New Orleans²⁷.

Even more than roads (often abandoned because of the costs of maintenance) and canals, railroads were to play a major role in the development of the US. The Baltimore & Ohio railroad²⁸ was only thirteen-miles long in 1830, but ten years later, there were 3,328 miles of railroad track, mostly in the eastern states, and in 1860, the mileage reached 30,626

²⁴ James Monroe served two terms as President, in 1820-1824 and 1824-1828.

²⁵ By that time: British Canada and Newfoundland, British, Spanish, French, Dutch and Danish islands in the Caribbean, British, French and Dutch Guyanas (South America).

²⁶ And by 'protecting' the South American republics, Britain secured markets for British trade.

²⁷ This explains why it was vital for American trade to control the Mississippi and especially the mouth of the river in order to ship American products from New Orleans across the Atlantic to Europe.

²⁸ 'Railroad' is the American English for British English 'railway', used in Canada.

miles. Together with railroads, the telegraph also contributed to building and uniting the country, with 50,000 miles of lines in 1861, linking New York to San Francisco.

Independence of Texas

Mexico had become independent from Spain in 1822 and covered today's US states of Texas, New-Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada and California, in addition to a vast portion of Central America. The Mexican authorities had permitted and encouraged American settlers to come to Texas, but these settlers, mostly Southerners, had brought their slaves with them, which was in contradiction with Mexican law, as slavery had been abolished in Mexico in 1829. The Mexican government, fearful of challenges from these Americans, stopped American immigration to Texas.

In 1835, the Mexican President, General de Santa Anna, reinforced central power, which prompted Texans to declare their independence as the Republic of Texas in 1836. The small garrison of Alamo, in San Antonio, was crushed by Mexican troops in overwhelming numbers, but Santa Anna was eventually defeated by Sam Houston's Texan army and Texas became independent, immediately asking to join the US. The request was rejected however, as the issue divided US public opinion: while southern and western states favoured Texas joining the Union, northern states feared that the new member state would increase the power of the pro-slavery South. But the Texans cleverly sought the friendship of Britain, whose textile industries could be supplied by Texan cotton in competition with US cotton, while the British also favoured an independent Texas blocking partly US westward expansion. The US, wishing to avoid a British-friendly state on its south-west border, renegotiated with Texas, which eventually joined the union in 1845.

Manifest Destiny...

Shortly before Texas became the 28th state of the Union in 1845, a Democrat journalist, John O'Sullivan, coined the following phrase: '[it is] our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions'. This meant that it was the obvious ('manifest') fate ('destiny') of the US to cover as much of the North American continent as possible, so that the immigrants (born in America or overseas – the 'multiplying millions') could settle the land and make it prosperous. 'Overspread the continent' must be understood as expanding the territory of the US from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, regardless of those populations already living there. In 1845, the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains were still the domain of the great Indian tribes (Sioux, Cheyenne, Apache, Arapaho...), while California and well as the South-West were Mexican territory. With Texas in the Union, the next step was to expand the US towards the Pacific, in a south-westerly direction.

At the expense of Mexico: California & the south-west²⁹

The Mexican government had broken off diplomatic relations with the US when Texas became a state of the Union in 1845 and in both Mexico and the US (especially the South and the West) the partisans of war grew more influential. After a last-minute negotiation on a border dispute had failed, the US army attacked in early 1846, and after a two-year war that saw mostly American victories, Mexico ceded California, New Mexico (then covering more than today's state) and Utah territories to the US against payment of \$ 15 millions.

Shortly after the beginning of hostilities, the US had agreed with Britain on the border with Canada, along the 49th parallel, in order to avoid a possible Anglo-Mexican alliance.

²⁹ The South-West is now the region covered by the states of New Mexico and Arizona. In 1845, the Utah territory that spread over today's Utah and Nevada was also Mexican.

This meant that the Oregon Territory (covering today's states of Oregon and Washington) was now in US hands.

In 1848, the US extended from the Atlantic seaboard, i.e. the thirteen original states, plus Maine and Florida, to the Pacific coast, and it covered almost all its present territory (with the exception of Alaska, Hawaii and a few Pacific islands). The south-west corner of the New Mexico territory (now in Arizona) was to be bought from Mexico in 1853 (the 'Gadsden Purchase'). The continental borders of the US were now fixed to the north with the British Empire in Canada, and to the south with Mexico.

In order to complete its expansion in the spirit of its 'manifest destiny', the US still had to control fully the territories west of the Mississippi and the Missouri and deep into the Rocky Mountains. Settlers, emigrants bound for California, gold-prospectors, fur-traders, as well as Mormons, had already penetrated these regions. But they were faced with the traditional obstacles: nature, with the formidable Rocky Mountains (much larger and higher than the Appalachians), as well as the Indians of the Great Plains and the South West.

To summarise...

The US in 1790 was keen on expanding its territory to the west, the south and the south-west. It faced Indian tribes unwilling to abandon their lands, European powers hostile to any enlargement of US territory, and an often difficult terrain (mountains, forests).

While communications between the Atlantic seaboard and the Ohio and Mississippi valleys were developed (roads, canals, railroads, telegraph), the US had to tackle human obstacles:

1) – the Indians; US public opinion was hostile to Indians, as they had often sided with the British and were blocking westward expansion; they were often destroyed or displaced by US forces and settlers, often in tragic conditions

2) – the European powers; the US adopted three different strategies:

- purchase

- negotiation

- military action

The US purchased Louisiana from the French (1803), fought the Spanish in Florida (1817) and negotiated its northern border with Britain (1846).

3) – Mexico; the Mexicans held a vast territory, stretching from the lower Mississippi to California; the US first annexed the Republic of Texas ('The Lone Star State', independent from Mexico since 1836) in 1845, in full agreement with the Texan government and then declared war on Mexico in 1846, eventually gaining a vast territory, covering today's states of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada and California.

Furthermore, the early 19th century saw the embryo of an American foreign policy with the Monroe Doctrine (see above) and the affirmation of a expansionist domestic policy encapsulated in the 'Manifest Destiny' (see above).

The addition of new territories becoming eventually new states fuelled the controversy on slavery and endangered the balance between pro- and anti-slavery states. When the latest portion of Mexican soil was bought by the US in 1853 and added to the territory of New Mexico, the future of the Union seemed frail...

A few films...

It is difficult to make a selection of films as there are so many of them... Yet, here are a few titles...

The Buccaneer, by Anthony Quinn (1958), with Yul Brynner and Charlton Heston; set during the Battle of New Orleans in the Anglo-American war of 1812

The Alamo, by John Wayne(1960), with John Wayne and Richard Widmark; a patriotic and epic version of the siege and destruction of the Alamo garrison by the Mexican army

How the West Was Won, by John Ford, Henry Hathaway, George Stevens (1963); one of the first 'cinerama' films; covers the history of the American west from the 1840s to the 1880s in a great epic, with a plethora of Hollywood actors of the period (James Stewart, Caroll Baker, Carolyn Jones, Gregory Peck, John Wayne, Henry Fonda, George Peppard, Richard Widmark...)

The Alamo, by John Lee Hancock (2004), with Dennis Quaid, Jason Patrick, Billy Bob Thornton; another epic and patriotic version of the siege, concluding with the Texan victory over the Mexican forces of General Santa Anna

Into the West, (2005); TV series in six parts, based on the stories of two families (emigrants, Indians) and covering the history of the American West from the Lewis & Clark expedition to the last decade of the 19th century; each episode by a different director, produced by Steven Spielberg.

Chapter Four

The Civil War – 1861-1865

As we have seen in our previous chapter on Westward Expansion, the new territories eventually becoming new states were to contribute in no small way to the volatile context of the 1850s leading up to the Civil War in 1861. Although it is commonly held that this brutal conflict between North and South was fought over the issue of slavery, the reality was not that simple: both regions certainly had a lot in common, but they had also become different in terms of economy, population and culture. Opponents of slavery ranged from sincere humanitarians and Christians to industrialists and politicians whose motives may have had little to do with fighting gross injustice and the frightful degradation of human beings.

Slavery nevertheless seemed to crystallise economic, political, cultural and moral issues, with the very future of the US at stake. Less than one century after the end of the War of Independence, the US was on the brink of a radical transformation with the South seceding from the Union. At the end of the Civil War, the US had been indeed transformed but never again the unity of the nation would be thus threatened from within.

NB: we use 'North' and 'South', as well as 'Northern' and 'Southern' in this chapter and others with a capital 'N' and a capital 'C' to denote political entities. The non-capitalised 'north', 'south' or 'west' and the corresponding adjectives are used as geographical terms only.

New states: slavery or not slavery?

Between 1836, when Texas became an independent republic (also see Chapter Three), and 1861, nine new states had been admitted in the Union: Michigan (1837), Florida (1845), Texas (1845), Iowa (1846), Wisconsin (1848), California (1850), Minnesota (1858), Oregon (1859) and Kansas (1861). By this time, the South had been overtaken by the North in terms of population, with two Northerners for one Southerner. This meant that the Southern states had fewer representatives in the House. With the admission of California, a free state (i.e. non-slavery), as the 31st state, the balance in the Senate was upset in favour of non-slavery (see fig. 1 below). This led to a crisis, with early calls for secession in the South. A compromise was reached, however, in order to appease the South, among other things by passing a Fugitive Slave Act which was more severe towards escaped slaves and those who assisted them than previous pieces of legislation.

This Act did not go down well with partisans of the abolition of slavery, who carried on helping runaway slaves escape to Canada³⁰, while the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 may have won new partisans to the abolitionist cause³¹. Furthermore, tension ran high with the introduction of the Kansas-

³⁰ Slave trading and slaveholding had been abolished in the British Empire respectively in 1807 and 1833.

³¹ *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a literary success in Britain as well, at a time when Scottish Highlanders were still evicted from their homes in order to make room for sheep or deer and Britain was expanding her already large colonial empire...

Nebraska Act, which gave both territories the right to decide by popular suffrage whether they should be slavery- or non-slavery. In Kansas, this led to violence between pro- and anti-slavery voters, notably the pro-slavery raid on the free town of Lawrence in 1856, to which the abolitionist John Brown retaliated with an attack on Pottawatomie. Violence even reached the Senate, with an antislavery senator beaten unconscious by a fellow- but pro-slavery Congressman. Yet no other act would be as symbolic as John Brown’s Raid on Harper’s Ferry in 1859.

John Brown, a determined abolitionist, led a raid against an arsenal in Virginia, hoping to start a slave insurrection, which did not materialise. Brown was arrested, tried and executed, thus becoming a martyr of the abolitionist cause³², while Southerners became even more convinced than before that they were under the threat of Northern intervention. Since the Democrats represented Southern interests, a possible Republican victory in the presidential election of 1860 would be taken as a sign of Northern hostility.

1850: the 31 states (with year of ratification of the Constitution or accession to statehood in chronological order)	
<u>Non-slavery</u>	<u>Slavery</u>
2 Pennsylvania, 1787	1 Delaware, 1787
3 New Jersey, 1787	
5 Connecticut, 1788	4 Georgia, 1788
6 Massachusetts, 1788	7 Maryland, 1788
9 New Hampshire, 1788	8 South Carolina, 1788
11 New York, 1788	10 Virginia, 1788
	12 North Carolina, 1789
13 Rhode Island, 1790	
14 Vermont, 1791	15 Kentucky, 1792
	16 Tennessee, 1796
17 Ohio, 1803	
19 Indiana, 1816	18 Louisiana, 1812
21 Illinois, 1818	20 Mississippi, 1817
23 Maine, 1820	22 Alabama, 1819
	24 Missouri, 1821
26 Michigan, 1837	25 Arkansas, 1836
	27 Florida, 1845
29 Iowa, 1846	28 Texas, 1845
30 Wisconsin, 1848	
<i>Total non-slavery states in 1849: 15</i>	<i>Total slavery states in 1849: 15</i>
31 California, 1850	
<i>From this date, all new states joining the Union were non-slavery</i>	

Fig. 1 – The 31 states in 1850

³² A song was written in his honour: ‘John Brown’s Body’, sung to the tune of ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic’.

Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth President of the US

The Republicans' electoral programme was undoubtedly inspired by Northern aspirations, and not least protectionist policies designed to favour Northern industry as well as agriculture, but also advocating a policy in favour of immigration and western expansion thanks to the Homestead Act and the building of a railroad to the Pacific (see below). As for slavery, however, the Republican stance was more moderate, condemning acts of violence like John Brown's Raid and acknowledging the right of each state to legislate on the matter, but opposing extension of slavery into the territories and new states. This, however, was enough for the South to regard Lincoln and the Republicans as a threat to their rights.

Lincoln was elected in 1860, and South Carolina seceded almost immediately in December, followed by Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas, all arguing that the Republicans would take away from each state its right to uphold slavery. The South Carolina Secession Ordinance stated that

...the non-slave-holding states had violated the constitutional rights of slave-holders: by failing to observe the Fugitive Slave Act, by permitting and encouraging abolitionist agitation and attempting to instigate slave insurrection, by trying to exclude slavery from the territories, and by 'assuming the right of deciding upon the propriety of our domestic institutions'.
(Jones, 1995)

The seceding Southern states then united in the Confederacy (i.e. 'The Confederate States of America'), as independent from the US, and drew up their constitution in February 1861.

When Lincoln was inaugurated in March, he declared secession illegal but also declared that he would not act against slavery where it already existed. The new President's main concern was keeping the Union together and he was willing to wait until the Southern states re-entered it. By 12 April, Southern Confederate troops opened fire on the Union garrison of Fort Sumter (South Carolina). The Civil War had just begun. Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee and North Carolina joined the Confederacy.

North and South: 'Yankees' against 'Johnny Rebs'

If the Union and the Confederacy were united by a common language and history, the gap between the industrial North and the agricultural South had become wider and both regions were markedly different (see fig. 2 below).

With 90% of American industries and most financial institutions, fast-growing cities and transport, the North was far more 'modern' than the South, which remained overwhelmingly agricultural as well as faithful to traditions inherited from the colonial and early post-colonial periods. Jones notes that 'the Southern planter class gave itself to the cult of romantic chivalry' (*ibid*), with 'agriculture as the only activity worthy of free men' (*ibid*). Jones also notes a tendency 'to resort more readily to weapons than other Americans and, moreover, to use them more savagely.' (*ibid*)

Yet, for all their contempt of banking and industry, Southern planters were dependent upon the financial institutions of the North as well as Northern shipping companies. Secession and war meant economic difficulties for the South which only a swift military victory for the Confederacy would forestall. Slavery, for the South, was the cornerstone of its social order, its economy and its very existence (for both slave-holder and non-slave-holder Southerners).

Northerners, on the other hand, were opposed to slavery on moral as well as socio-economic grounds: if territories and new states were left free to decide over the issue of slavery, then they would become less attractive for immigrants in search of jobs or land. There were much fewer immigrants to the South simply because there were fewer jobs available, most land-work being done by unpaid slaves. The North attracted most immigrants (particularly from Ireland): those immigrants, once settled and at work, became consumers for

American-made products. Slaves, having neither income nor freedom, could not contribute to a thriving economy by becoming consumers.

The North: the United States of America (aka the Union, Federals, ‘Yankees’)	The South: the Confederate States of America (aka the Confederacy, Confederates ‘Johnny Rebs’)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 22 millions inhabitants, urbanisation already developed, attracting immigrants from Europe - opposed to slavery - 90% of American industries (incl. shipyards and arms factories) - most of the mineral resources (iron, coal), as well as meat, grain and dairy products - most financial institutions (banks), shipping and insurance companies - in favour of protectionism (i.e. tariffs on goods imported from overseas to protect American products on the domestic market) - developed transport infrastructures (railroads, canals, river navigation) - open to progress and new ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 9 millions inhabitants (incl. 3.5 millions slaves), a few towns and cities but scattered, rural pattern of settlement - staunch partisans of slavery - 10% of American industries - agricultural economy based on products like cotton, sugar, tobacco, rice, with little diversification - dependent upon the North for finance and shipping - in favour of free-trade (exports and imports free of tariffs or taxes to remain competitive on European markets) - transport less developed - traditionalist

Fig. 2 – Comparing North and South

A cruel war...

At the beginning of the war, both sides had their strong and weak points: if the North was self-sufficient in weapon and ammunition production while the South depended upon European supplies, the Confederacy could afford to fight a defensive war on its own, familiar, ground, possibly defeating the North’s more numerous forces on the offensive (which did not deter the Confederates to attack the Federals). The South also had a long coastline which was not easy to blockade entirely. But on its border with the Union, four slave states (Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky and Missouri³³) refused to secede and stayed with the Union.

The war was fought in two main theatres: Virginia, where the Confederates enjoyed a certain initial advantage, and the Mississippi Valley which came under Federal attack from north and south, therefore enabling Union forces to threaten a split of the Confederacy in two, which was eventually achieved in July 1863 after the Union victory at Vicksburg (Mississippi).

The cost in human lives was very high. At the battle of Shiloh (Tennessee, April 1862), the total number of casualties reached 24,000, approximately one-fourth of the total of troops engaged. In June 1863, the greatest battle of the Civil war was fought at Gettysburg (Pennsylvania) with yet another Union victory, at the total cost of 51,000 casualties over three days³⁴. From then on, Confederate forces under General Lee were forced on the defensive. In November of the same year Lincoln gave a short speech remembered as ‘The Gettysburg Address’, on the site of the battle, of which these lines are an excerpt:

³³ Missouri was divided between sympathisers of the Union and of the Confederacy, which led to nasty attacks on both sides. Jesse James, the future outlaw, is reputed to have fought for the South in Missouri.

³⁴ By comparison, the first day of the Battle of the Somme (northern France) in 1916 cost the British and imperial forces 20,000 dead and 40,000 wounded.

The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.
 (<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gettysburgaddress.htm>)

By 1864, the South was suffering heavily from shortages, as the Union naval blockade became tighter. This situation worsened when Union General William Sherman launched a campaign through Georgia and the Carolinas, destroying all that could be used by the enemy. In Virginia, Confederate General Robert E. Lee could no longer resist the pressure of Federal forces under the command of General Grant. The South, unrecognised by European powers like Britain and France, starved and devastated, was vanquished. Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox, Virginia, 9 April 1865.

Out of a total of more than 3 millions men engaged in the war (approximately 2 millions by the North, 1 million by the South), the losses were high:

The Union	The Confederacy
360,000 total dead (110,000 killed in action) 275,000 wounded	258,000 total dead (93,000 killed in action) 137,000 wounded (one in four Southerners of military age killed or wounded)

Fig. 3 – Casualties in the Civil War

These casualties can partly explain the later reluctance of Americans to send soldiers overseas to fight in Europe during the two world conflicts³⁵. Furthermore, while the Northern states had been left relatively unscathed by the fighting, the South was ruined, its plantations abandoned, its transport infrastructures destroyed, some of its cities damaged by bombardment...

Wartime politics in the North

The North carried on with business and expansion during the Civil War. Two measures are worth noting:

- the Homestead Act (1862), granting 160 acres (approximately 0.650 square kilometre) ‘of public land to any citizen or applicant for citizenship who occupied it for five years’ (Jones, 1995)
- the Pacific Railroad Act (1862), facilitating grants for the building of a transcontinental railroad.

Legislation was also passed to reinforce protection of the American markets and to re-instate a federal banking system.

As for slavery, we have seen that Abraham Lincoln did not make its abolition a priority, as maintaining the Union was what mattered above all. But from 1861, Congress

³⁵ It did not prevent US soldiers to fight against the Indians or later against Spanish forces in Cuba and the Philippines in 1898.

passed a series of anti-slavery measures, notably the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and the territories, the freeing of slaves from rebel owners and the employment of blacks, including freed slaves, as soldiers. These black Union soldiers (186,000 in total) served in segregated units and their pay was lower than the white soldiers, but they fought well and may have taken the first step towards full emancipation³⁶. On 1 January 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which stated that all slaves in areas still held by rebellious forces (i.e. Confederates) would be free. But this did not apply yet to parts of the Confederacy already occupied by Union forces at that date, or to the four slave states which had remained loyal to the Union.

In early 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution was finally passed by the House of Representatives, after being passed by Congress in 1864. It stated the following:

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2. Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.
(quoted in Mauk & Oakland, 2002)

Abolition of slavery, while freeing all black slaves from their previous owners, did not provide them with food, work and home. Black Americans were to suffer from segregation and poverty, often deprived of political rights in some of the Southern states. There was still a long and hard way to go until the symbolic gesture of defiance by Rosa Parks 90 years later in 1955, when she refused to give up her seat for a white passenger on a segregated bus in Alabama...

To summarise...

By the 1850s, the US was becoming increasingly divided over the issue of slavery on moral, political and economic grounds:

1 – the moral aspects of slavery were abhorrent to humanists and some Christians who wanted it abolished (especially in the North); in the South however, slavery was thought to be in accordance with the Bible and the normal ‘order of things’

2 – the issue of slavery being adopted or not in the territories and the new states entering the Union was also divisive: the South was in favour of letting each state decide in favour or against slavery, while the North was in favour of a federal policy forbidding slavery in all new states; this would inevitably lead to a Congress with a non-slavery majority, threatening Southern interests (see fig. 1 above)

3 – slavery-based economy meant that slaves could not take full part in the economic life of the country, as they were excluded from the markets; it also meant that slavery-based economy was overwhelmingly agricultural and that staple products like cotton were to be exported to foreign markets (Europe): the South was therefore in favour of free-trade (no tariffs or taxes on exports and imports) in order to be competitive; the North, with its growing industries and its production of grain and cattle, needed the American domestic market protected from British manufactured products (hence its ‘protectionist policies).

With the election of Republican Abraham Lincoln in 1860, the South feared for its economy, the rights of each state, but most of all for its social order based on slave labour.

³⁶ These black soldiers in the Union forces are the object of Edward Zwick’s film *Glory* (1989).

Tension ran high in both North and South, and the states in the latter decided to secede (Lower South, then Upper South). Lincoln, however, did not want to abolish slavery where it already existed but prioritised the maintaining of the Union. Things had gone beyond control, however, and the war started in April 1861.

The North had the advantage in numbers of population, industrial and financial power, shipbuilding facilities and was therefore not reliant upon overseas supplies. The South, by contrast, had little industry, a non-diversified agriculture (cotton or tobacco, but not enough staple food) and a rather small navy. But Southerners could afford to fight a defensive war on their own ground, with which they were familiar. Their coastline was very long, forcing the North to increase its naval forces to enforce a blockade.

The South enjoyed initial successes, especially on its north-eastern border, but the North managed to encircle it effectively thanks to its naval blockade (making it increasingly difficult for the South to obtain supplies from overseas as well as export its raw materials) and also because Union forces came to control the Mississippi Valley, cutting the South in two. With the Union victory at the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863, it became inevitable that the South would collapse, but it took almost two more years before the Confederates surrendered...

The Civil War was probably the first 'modern war' in terms of casualties, destruction, massive use of artillery and transport. Although one of its consequences was the abolition of slavery, it did not necessarily improve the condition of black Americans, especially in the South. The ex-slaves were now free but nonetheless segregated against and regarded as second-class citizens.

The War also reinforced the authority of the Federal government, but it hardly stopped or slowed down westward expansion, which carried on during the conflict, encouraged by the Homestead Act and the Pacific Railroad Act, both in 1862.

Books & Films

It is difficult not to mention Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*, as these two, very different novels, have become literary symbols of the American Civil War. The former was published in 1852 (see above), while the latter was published in 1936, received the Pulitzer Prize³⁷ in 1937 and was adapted for the screen in 1939. The film, directed by Victor Fleming, received ten Academy Awards, including eight Oscars, and it was undoubtedly a blockbuster.

Both the novel and the film give a Southern perspective, following the life of Scarlett O'Hara, a 'Southern Belle', throughout the Civil War and during the 'Reconstruction' of the South. Some scenes of the films are particularly significant:

- 1) – at the barbeque party on the 'Twelve Oaks' plantation, just before the outbreak of the war, the gentlemen discuss the situation while the ladies take a nap in the afternoon; Scarlett's father, Gerald, claims the right of each state to decide (on slavery, on remaining in or seceding from the Union), while a guest from Charleston, Rhett Butler has a few warning and prophetic words for his fellow Southerners as to the industrial might of the North and the near total absence of weapon factories in the South
- 2) – after the Battle of Gettysburg, Scarlett and her sister-in-law Melanie await anxiously for the casualty lists to be released; Melanie's husband is not among the

³⁷ The Pulitzer Prize has been awarded every year since 1917 by Columbia University (NY) in print journalism, literary achievement and musical composition.

casualties, but most of Scarlett's former 'beaux' (young gentlemen who used to flirt with her) are dead; this shows the extent of the brutality of the war

3) – during the siege of Atlanta by Sherman's Union troops, Scarlett goes to the railroad station, transformed into a field hospital for the wounded, in search of a doctor; the camera then shows the long rows of men on stretchers, moaning and suffering, while a torn Confederate flag flies up a mast and the soundtrack features Southern tunes played at a slower pace, almost like a funeral march...

Blacks in the film are depicted as happy slaves but they are heavily stereotyped, with Scarlet's strict but loving nanny ('Mammy'), the lazy and irritating Prissy, the strong and good-hearted Big Sam, serving in general under benevolent and paternalist white owners. As a matter of fact, the only 'bad' blacks are those who fall under the evil influence of the 'Yankees' at the end of the war, becoming drunkards or tramps. Whether 'good' or 'bad', they are all under the authority of the whites, even the strong character of Mammy. The message seems to be that the Yankees have brought only evil to the blacks, who, after the end of the War, are shown finding happiness again only as servants of their former white owners, and still in the background...

When the book was published, African Americans were nineteen years away from Rosa Park's gesture of defiance in Alabama.

Other films (in a long list)...

They Died With Their Boots On, by Raoul Walsh (1941); the military career of George Armstrong Custer; although Custer is usually associated with the wars against the Indians and the Battle of Little Big Horn (see chapter five), he fought in the Union forces during the Civil War, and the film also shows this aspect of his life

The Red Badge of Courage, by John Huston (1951); screen adaptation of a novel by Stephen Crane (the history of a young Union soldier)

The Horse Soldiers, by John Ford (1959); the history of a Union cavalry raid through the South (inspired by Sherman's campaign)

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, by Sergio Leone (1966); 'spaghetti' western set in the West during the Civil War

The Outlaw Josey Wales, by Clint Eastwood (1976); the history of a Missouri pro-Confederate guerrilla fighter who refuses to surrender in 1865

The Long Riders, by Walter Hill (1980); an evocation of the James-Younger gang (Jesse James), set in post-Civil War Missouri; all members of the gang are proud of their Southern heritage and some are veterans of the Civil War

North and South (TV series, 1985, 1986, 1994); evocation of the Civil War through the history of two friends (a Northerner and a Southerner)

Glory, by Edward Zwick (1989); the black regiments in the Union forces

Gettysburg, by Ronald Maxwell (1993); a 4-hour evocation of the Battle

Sommersby, by Jon Amiel (1993); the return of a Confederate veteran to his farm

Ride With the Devil, by Ang Lee (1999); story set in Missouri, where the Civil War was particularly fierce and cruel (evocation of Southern guerrilla fighter Quantrill)

Gods and Generals, by Ronald Maxwell (2003); prequel to *Gettysburg*

Cold Mountain, by Antony Minghella (2003); set mostly behind the lines in the South

Chapter Five

The Indians

When Christopher Columbus ‘discovered’ the New World, he merely opened a new sea route to the West. The New World was new only from a European point of view and even so, such territories as ‘Helluland’ (Baffin Island?), ‘Markland’ (Labrador?) and ‘Vinland’ (Newfoundland), as recorded in the so-called *Vinland Sagas*³⁸, were known to Columbus. But the Genoese explorer was looking for a Western route to India and he had no way of realising that both the territories mentioned in the saga and the islands he explored (today’s Bahamas, Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic³⁹) were part of the same continent. Believing he had discovered India (his ultimate goal), Columbus is reputed to have naturally called ‘Indians’ the natives he met⁴⁰ (see below). What these ‘Indians’ called themselves however, was to become one in many points of contention between them and the European newcomers.

The history of the Indians in America is fraught with incomprehension, misunderstanding, violence and tragedy. Often in the shadow of other minorities, the Indians of the USA (but also of Canada and Northern Mexico) are often forgotten or relegated to the heavily stereotyped images supplied by Hollywood film industry. And yet, the toponymy of the North American continent is rich in Indian place-names, from East to West and North to South. The Indians were the first to populate this continent and without their help, the settlers of the 16th and 17th century would have found it very difficult, if not impossible, to survive. Indians peoples were markedly different from one another, in terms of language, lifestyles and social organisation. Their religious beliefs as well as their attitude to nature and to land were to be a major source of incomprehension and conflict with the European settlers.

Indians? Native Americans? Amerindians?

Pr. Zimmerman notes that ‘...liberal whites may scrupulously avoid the word “Indian”, but it is perfectly satisfactory to many Native people.’ (Zimmerman, 1996). He further quotes Native activist Russell Means, who ‘argues that “Indian” is acceptable because...Columbus described aboriginal Americans not as *Indios* (“people of India”) but as people *In Dios* (“in God”).’ (*ibid*, italics in the original text). We shall use the term ‘Indian’ in this chapter.

What Indians and non-Indian Native American people called and still call themselves is another matter. Zimmerman gives a few examples:

³⁸ *Grænlandinga Saga* and *Eirik’s Saga*.

³⁹ Haiti and the Dominican Republic are two independent states on the same island, named ‘Hispaniola’ by Columbus.

⁴⁰ The sagas mention natives as ‘Skrælingar’.

Known as:	Calling themselves:
- Ojibway (Ojibwa, Chippewa; in Ontario, North Dakota)	- Anishinabe (possible translation: ‘the people’)
- Eskimo (Northern Canada, Alaska, Greenland; ‘Eskimo’ is an Algonquian word for ‘eaters of raw meat’)	- Inuit, Aleut (possible translation: ‘the people’)
- Sioux (Great Plains; ‘Sioux’ is an Ojibway word for ‘snake’, also meaning ‘enemies’)	- Dakota, Nakota, Lakota
- Nez Perce (Idaho, Oregon; ‘Nez Perce’ comes from the French for ‘pierced nose’)	- Nimi’ipuu (‘the people’)

Indian names

Not unlike the names of the tribes of Ancient Britain reaching us through chronicles written in Latin, we often know the different Indian peoples or individuals by names given to them by others (other Indians, Europeans – see above ‘Nez Perce’). One of the most famous Indian leader and fighter, Geronimo, a Chiricahua Apache, was given this Spanish name by the Mexicans, whereas his original name was Goyathlay (literally ‘The One Who Yawns’). It goes without saying that such names as Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Red Cloud, Rain In The Face, are all translations or adaptations in English. Other names, like those of activists Dennis Banks and John Mitchell sound conspicuously English when in fact Banks and Mitchell are Ojibway. In the second half of the 19th century, as Indian resistance was crushed, several Indians, among whom many children, were sent forcibly sent to schools and colleges, both in the US and Canada, in order to become ‘disindianised’, which must have meant being forced to adopt an English-sounding name, among other things.

First contacts

We know that the first humans to reach America must have come from Asia via the Behring Strait between Eastern Siberia and Western Alaska, approximately 30,000 years ago. When Leif Ericsson established his settlement in Vinland in the late 10th century, the contacts with the natives (‘Skrælingar’) became violent and this may explain why the settlement at L’Anse-aux-Meadows⁴¹ was abandoned.

At the beginning of the 16th century, French, English and Portuguese fishermen started fishing cod on the Grand Banks, off the coast of Newfoundland, while Spaniards landed in Florida and French started settling along the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The first contacts were not necessarily violent, but the White men brought diseases unknown yet to the Indians, like smallpox, which killed many natives, while the white men were saved from such afflictions as scurvy thanks to Indian medicine. Otherwise, the white men engaged in the fur trade with the Indians, who also showed the new settlers how to cope with the often difficult conditions of a hostile natural environment.

But the relationships were to deteriorate with the increasing numbers of white settlers colonising the Atlantic seaboard. If it is true that a Powhatan chief offered his daughter Pocahontas to an Englishman, John Smith, the same Smith did not understand why the Indians would not acknowledge his authority or recognise the King of England. Other settlers regarded Indians as creatures of the Devil and violence ensued. The fact that Indians found the concept of land property totally alien, if not entirely repugnant, did not help the

⁴¹ From the French ‘L’Anse-aux-Méduses’ (‘Jellyfish Cove’).

relationships with white settlers who came precisely in search of land for themselves. In some cases, the settlers played tribe against tribe and may have exacerbated inter-Indian conflicts which had existed before their arrival.

Involvement in European trade and wars

French, English, Dutch and Spaniards were rivals in Europe and in America as well. The French allied themselves with the Huron, the Dutch and the English with the Iroquois, in order to get the better part of the fur trade. Even if they were defeated by the French in the end, the Iroquois managed to become the most powerful native confederation of the North East. European politics in North America had therefore affected Indian inter-tribal relationships.

The fur trade disrupted the economy of peoples like the Micmacs, who used to live from fishing but became hunters and traders, changing their way of life – as well as their diet. Huron and Iroquois abandoned agriculture in order to hunt and prepare furs for the European trade (beavers in particular). At the same time, a few Europeans, mostly Frenchmen, intermingled and intermarried with Indian women, which was less frequent among Protestant English and Dutch. European missionaries managed to make a few converts, but Indian beliefs held – and still hold – strong.

The Anglo-French rivalry resulted in ‘The Seven Years War’, remembered as ‘The French and Indian War’⁴², which saw once again the Iroquois fight alongside the British. Despite support from Abenaki, Illinois or Miami⁴³ Indians, the French were finally defeated by the British and their Iroquois allies. Yet, the Indians were temporarily protected by the King of Britain, who decided that European expansion would not extend west of the Appalachians, thus reserving this territory for the Indians.

The War of Independence was to upset this fragile balance. The Indians tended to side with the British, whom they now regarded as their allies, against the American colonists, who included in their grievances the fact they were not allowed to settle beyond the Appalachians. After the British defeat, the Indians were left facing the Americans and the increasing number of new settlers hungry for land.

East of the Mississippi

The defeated Iroquois were forced to abandon some of their lands in 1784, while a confederation of Indians (Shawnee, Delaware, Ottawa, Potawatomie) in the Ohio valley and south of the Great Lakes was defeated by American troops. An ordinance of 1787 recognised certain rights to the Indians, but white settlement on Indian lands carried on. Since the European concept of private property was alien to the Indians, the fact that white men started enclosing tracks of land or forbidding Indians to collect wood or hunt in forests could only lead to confrontation. Indian resistance east of the Mississippi was crushed in 1814 by Andrew Jackson, after the Shawnee Tecumseh⁴⁴ had been defeated and killed by the Americans two years before.

For those Indians who decided to stay and not to move across the Mississippi, it meant complying with Federal policies and adapting to a ‘civilised’ (i.e. ‘White’) way of life, by becoming Christians, turning to agriculture and sending their children to school. The Cherokee Sequoyah even created a script for the Cherokee language. But the Indian Removal Act of 1830 simply forbade Indians to remain east of the Mississippi, and the ‘Five Civilised

⁴² The fictional character of Benjamin Martin (Mel Gibson) in the film *The Patriot* by Roland Emmerich (2000) claims he fought in that war.

⁴³ The Miami lived around Lake Michigan. Their name bears no relation with the city of Miami in Florida.

⁴⁴ Also see Chapter Three.

Tribes' (including Cherokee) were forcibly sent west. This deportation is remembered as 'The Trail of Tears'.

How the West Was Won⁴⁵ ...

It is characteristic that treaties signed between Indians and Americans were often denounced or not respected by the latter. This was notably the case in the Great Plains and the south-west, which were to become the last battlefields between the Indians and the US Army.

Immigrants in search of land or gold came in ever increasing numbers, particularly for the Gold Rush of 1849, but also after 1862, when the Homestead Act⁴⁶ and the advancing railroad attracted even more settlers.

With Texas and New-Mexico entering the Union, respectively as a state and a territory, in 1846, Comanche and Apaches started fighting to preserve their land. To the north, the Great Plains Indians (Sioux, Arapahos, Cheyenne) became increasingly worried with white hunters decimating buffalos. The rest of the story is a succession of conflicts, broken treaties, massacres and deportation.

The Great Plains Indians were mostly nomadic, living off hunting. The large herds of buffalos supplied them with meat and hides. These Indians were excellent horse-riders and had a long tradition of fighting, although for some of them, combat was more about 'marking coup' on the enemy than actually killing and destroying. Not unlike the Indians of the Atlantic seaboard, Great Plains Indians did not understand the concept of private property, while their attitude to nature tended to be one of harmony and respect, rather than domestication. It is estimated that there were 300,000 Indians west of the Mississippi, with 240,000 of them nomadic.

A look at the following incidents and battles should inform us about the nature of the relationships between Indians and whites:

- 1862: a party of Santee Sioux massacred 500 settlers in Minnesota; 300 Indians were hanged in reprisal
- 1864: a party of Cheyenne was attacked and massacred by American militiamen at Sand Creek, Colorado
- 1866: a party of Sioux warriors attacked and destroyed a group of US soldiers trying to build a road crossing Sioux hunting-grounds
- 1868: Cheyenne and Arapaho were defeated.

The US Government set a Peace Commission and Congress agreed to create two reservations for the Great Plains Indians, in the Black Hills (South Dakota) and in the 'Indian Territory' (today's Oklahoma). But it took a few more years of fighting before all tribes had withdrawn to these reservations. When gold was discovered in the Black Hills, it provoked the Sioux into taking up arms, and it was in this context that US cavalry forces under the command of Colonel Custer were defeated in 1876 by a larger Indian force of Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho warriors under the command of Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, at Little Big Horn (Montana).

This Indian victory⁴⁷, however, was short-lived, and most Great Plains Indians once again retreated to the reservations. The last Indians to fight the Whites were the Nez Percé of the north-west, under the command of Chief Joseph in 1877, while the last great figure of Indian resistance was to be Chiricahua Apache Geronimo, who finally surrendered in 1886,

⁴⁵ I have borrowed this title from the epic western of 1962, by John Ford, Henry Hathaway and George Stevens.

⁴⁶ Aso see Chapter Four.

⁴⁷ We should remember that in 1879, the British were defeated by the Zulu warriors at the battle of Isandlwana, Zululand, South Africa.

after leading a guerrilla war against both US and Mexican troops. Geronimo and his warriors were then exiled to Florida.

The last, tragic outbreak of Indian defiance took place in 1890, when Sioux gathered for a 'Ghost Dance', which was deemed dangerous enough by the authorities to warrant yet another massacre of about 300 Indians. What eventually defeated the Indians in the west was a combination of technological superiority, sheer numbers and the fact that the large herds of buffalos were almost completely destroyed⁴⁸.

Surviving...

In the aftermath of the last Indian wars, US policy towards the defeated tribes was to 'civilise' them, chiefly by making Indians learn English, abandon their native dress, languages and beliefs and attend schools where, according to the founder of the Carlisle Indian School (Pennsylvania), educators would "kill the Indian...and save the man" (quoted in Zimmerman, 1996). Zimmerman remarks that 'A few successfully absorbed white culture, but most left with little more than a profoundly confused cultural identity.' (*ibid*). Indian writer and activist Zitkala-Ša remembers the day when her long hair was cut at one of these schools which she was forced to attend:

I remember being dragged out [from under the bed where she was hiding], though I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of myself, I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair.

I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's!

(Zitkala-Ša, in *American Indian Stories*, first published in 1921, quoted in Zitkala-Ša, 2003)⁴⁹

Tribal structures were indeed broken up by the Dawes Act of 1887, which divided Indian communal lands into plots of 160 acres (cf. The Homestead Act of 1862) and suppressed tribal councils, while the Indian Territory was opened for white settlement in 1889⁵⁰, and admitted as the 46th state in the Union as Oklahoma in 1907. The Burke Act of 1906 had made lands on reservations open for purchase by white settlers, while making it more difficult for Indians to become American citizens but subjected nevertheless to US laws.

Indians survived in dire poverty, with families broken by alcoholism, domestic violence and suicides. The 'assimilation' policies of the Dawes Act had failed. And yet, Indians started organising themselves in The Society of American Indians (1911), while Indian culture became an object of interest, in spite of the grossly negative image conveyed by the early 'Westerns'. Indians were eventually granted American citizenship in 1924, partly as recognition of their services in the US forces during WWI. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Democrat) became President in 1932, policies changed, notably with The Indian Reorganisation Act (1934, as part of the 'New Deal'⁵¹), which put an end to the parcelling of Indian lands (Dawes Act, 1887) and recognised Indian religious practices as well as tribal governments.

⁴⁸ Jones (1995) gives the figure of 13 millions buffalos in 1865 and 200 in 1883.

⁴⁹ The situation was similar in Canada and is evoked in Joseph Boyden's novel *Three Day Road* (2006).

⁵⁰ This is the context of the last scene in *Far and Away*, a film by Ron Howard (1992).

⁵¹ The 'New Deal' refers to a series of measures and recovery programmes initiated by Franklin Roosevelt from 1933 to 1938 to help the US to recover from the Great Depression.

Indians in post-World War II

Indians fought in WWII⁵² and the Navaho Code Talkers, among others, made a remarkable contribution by using a specific code in their native language, thus confusing the Japanese listening to the US forces radio messages.

But the US government policy in the 1950s attempted to suppress reservations altogether ('termination'), as if to get rid of the Indian identity. Several Indians, however, inspired by the Civil Rights Movement of Martin Luther King and the example of the African Americans, as well as by the struggles of colonial people in Africa and Asia for independence, formed the American Indian Movement in 1968 and engaged in symbolic but effective actions (occupation of the former prison of Alcatraz, 1969, occupation of the Indian Affairs Bureau in Washington, 1972, march from California to Washington, 1978).

In 1975, the Nixon administration (Republican) passed The Indian Self-determination Act, which marked a comeback to The Indian Reorganisation Act of 1934.

By 1980, Indians numbered ca. 1 million, with 50% living in cities, mostly west of the Mississippi. The US census of 2003 gave a figure of over 2,780,000 Indians in the US.

The image of Indians in films

More than any other form of artistic expression, cinema has contributed to the different images of the Indians, from blood-thirsty savages to friendly ecologists... We shall quote only a few films in a very long list.

Stagecoach, by John Ford (1939); although Ford later filmed the Indians in a more nuanced way, this film shows the Apache as cruel savages, curiously speechless and only seen on a few images, which might reflect the isolation in which the contemporary Indians lived in the 1930s, despite Roosevelt's policies.

They Died With Their Boots On, by Raoul Walsh (1941); this film shows Colonel G.A. Custer in a favourable light, as a dashing hero, protector of the Indians but betrayed by unscrupulous white speculators and politicians; Crazy Horse (played by white actor Anthony Quinn) and the other Indian leaders are depicted as brave but uncompromising warriors, stereotyped with feather-bonnets, deep voices and poor English, eventually at the mercy of the white men's paternalistic goodwill.

Cheyenne Autumn, by John Ford (1964); after his post-WWII trilogy⁵³ where Indians were still stereotyped as they had been in films like *They Died With Their Boots On*, Ford attempted to show the conditions on Indian reservations and the revolt of men (and women) in the face of injustice; actors playing Indians are, once again, whites, and the Cheyenne are 'protected' by the friendship of the 'good' whites (a few US officers, a young Quaker woman, an official from Washington), but the tone was much more friendly, if still paternalistic, than in the pre- and immediate post- WWII films.

Little Big Man, by Arthur Penn, *A Man Called Horse*, by Elliott Silverstein, *Soldier Blue*, by Ralph Nelson (all 1970); these three films mark a breakthrough in the Western genre by attempting to show part of the plot from an Indian point of view, giving more prominent roles to Indian actors, and using Indian dialogues much more often than before; *Little Big Man* reviews the character of Colonel Custer in a far less favourable light than in *They Died...*, together with a few emblematic figures of the

⁵² American and Canadian Indians had also fought in WWI. Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* tells the story of two young Cree from Canada on the Western Front.

⁵³ *Fort Apache* (1948), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), *Rio Grande* (1950), the so-called 'cavalry trilogy'.

West (Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill Hickok), while showing the battles between Indians and US forces as less epic and much more cruel; *A Man Called Horse* tells the story of an English Lord taken prisoner by a Sioux tribe and adapting to his captors' way of life; like *Little Big Man*, the film attempts to give the Indian point of view by focusing on everyday life as well as rites and traditions, with several lines spoken in native language; *Soldier Blue* recounts the Sand Creek Massacre (see above, p....) and it is one the first films to show graphic violence to an extent which was unknown to the genre until then.

Jeremiah Johnson, Sydney Pollack (1972); the film shows the life of a white 'mountain man' and his relationship with the different tribes (Crows, Flatheads, Blackfeet), as well as with other mountain men and white settlers; the image of Jeremiah Johnson incapable of fishing in order to survive under the impassive gaze of a Crow warrior mounted on his horse is symbolic of this new perspective: Indians are still brave warriors, but they are shown as superior to white men when it comes to life in the harsh environment of the Rocky Mountains; furthermore, they are shown not as one, single, entity, but as grouped in vastly different tribes with whom interaction and coexistence is possible, unless disrupted by white interference in Indian matters (like the desecration of Crow burial ground by a party of US soldiers in the film).

Dances With Wolves, Kevin Costner (1990); after a gap which saw the Western genre grow out of fashion, Kevin Costner gives a remarkable picture of the Great Plains Indians and their contacts with the Whites in the 1860s; again trying to adopt the Indian point of view, the film gives ample room to Lakota Sioux everyday life and traditions; Indians are played by Indian actors speaking Lakota; *Dances...* is not just about the Lakota, but evokes also the threat on nature (the massacre of the buffalo, the rubbish dump, the killing of the wolf); if somewhat a bit naïve, it serves as a reminder of a culture which was eradicated forever.

Geronimo: an American Legend, Walter Hill (1993); a powerful evocation of this legendary figure of Indian resistance.

Windtalkers, John Woo (2002); outside the Western genre, this film evokes the Navaho code talkers who fought the Japanese in the Pacific, an aspect of Indian history which has received too little attention.

To summarise...

Indians in North America were not just one single people, but comprised several different tribes with varied lifestyles and languages, as well as social and political organisations. The coming of the white settlers disrupted Indian societies from the very beginning.

If the early contacts were marked by Indian curiosity and willingness to help the whites, the relationships soon became hostile when often antagonistic civilisations clashed. Indians were regarded as heathens, but more importantly, their attitude towards nature and land made them appear as 'lazy savages' in the eyes of the whites who fought and sometimes destroyed entire tribes on the Atlantic seaboard. The fact that Indians did not understand the concept of private property marked them off as 'uncivilised' in the eyes of the Europeans.

Powerful Indian confederations of tribes associated with one group of settlers or the other (French, Dutch, English) and European rivalries extended to Indians, whose

economy and lifestyles changed under the pressure of white traders, particularly in the fur trade. White settlers wanted Indians removed as far west as possible in order to settle more land, but Indians were officially protected by the King of Britain.

Because Indians tended to side with the British during the War of Independence, the newly independent Americans, resentful of apparent Indian loyalty to the British and hungry for lands, opted for a harsh policy, leaving Indians with no other option but either rebellion (like Tecumseh, killed in 1812) or submission and 'civilisation', like the Cherokees. But even 'civilised' Indians were deemed an obstacle to expansion and the Cherokee were eventually forcibly removed and deported to the west of the Mississippi ('The Trail of Tears', following The Indian Removal Act of 1830 forbidding Indians to reside east of the Mississippi). These displaced tribes had to co-exist with other Indians, which led to confrontation and even conflicts between tribes.

With the Louisiana purchase (1803) and the annexation of the South West (Texas, New Mexico, 1846), the US gained a huge territory populated by nomadic tribes with warlike traditions and excellent horsemanship:

- *the Great Plains Indians: Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho*
- *the Indians of Texas: Comanche*
- *the Indians of the South West: Apache.*

Although treaties were passed with these different tribes, often following difficult and cruel military campaigns, white settlers, railroad companies and investors often forced the hand of the US government. Treaties were not respected and the Great Plains Indians, as well as the Apache, fought the whites bravely (Indian victory at Little Big Horn, 1876) but desperately, as the US forces had superior technology and the white settlers were increasing in numbers, almost exterminating the vast buffalo herds on which the Indians had traditionally relied for food and hides.

After 1890, the very Indian identity was threatened of total eradication by US attempts at 'civilising' the Indians through education and the breaking off of Indian communal lands and Indian tribal structures (Dawes Act, 1887). Eventually granted American citizenship in 1924, the Indians were nevertheless the most deprived community of the US, badly affected by unemployment, alcoholism, domestic violence... Only in 1934 did the New Deal policies of President Roosevelt restore Indian common lands and tribal governments.

In the 1950s, the US government attempted to 'terminate' Roosevelt's policy by suppressing the reservations and the tribal authorities. This, however, led to Indian protests in the 1860s and 1970s (the American Indian Movement was founded in 1968). Reservations and tribal authorities have been preserved, but Indians still struggle to preserve their identity, their rights and their lands (in the US as well as in Canada).

About Westerns...

All the films but one in the list above belong to the 'Western' genre, which in the early 1920s to reach its golden age in the 1940s and 1950s. There was a decline between the end of the 1970s until the 1990s, when films like *Dances With Wolves* (1990), *Tombstone* (by George P. Cosmatos, 1993) and *Wyatt Earp* (by Lawrence Kasdan, 1994) seemed to be the forerunners of a Western revival. Actors like Clint Eastwood have kept the genre alive however with films like *Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976), *Pale Rider* (1985) and *Unforgiven* (1992). But so far, new Westerns are very few, although Jonathan Kaplan made *Bad Girls* in 1993, Sam Raimi directed *The Quick and the Dead* (with Sharon Stone as a lady gun-fighter), in 1995, and Kevin Costner came back to the genre with *Open Range* in 2003. More recently, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, by Andrew Dominik (2007) or James Mangold's *3:10 to Yuma* (2007), a remake from the version by Delmer Daves in 1957

Italian film-maker Sergio Leone made an unexpected contribution to the genre, notably with *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966, with Clint Eastwood) and *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1969), thus creating the 'spaghetti western' sub-genre.

It should also be noted that two American series, *Young Guns* and *Doctor Quinn*, have been broadcast on Norwegian TV2, both presenting a more different image of the West, where women, blacks, Indians, Chinese immigrants have a more active role than in most traditional westerns.

When watching films in general, attention should be paid to a certain number of things, including the way the images are filmed, the camera angle, the soundtrack, the amount of dialogue... Some film-makers like to film their actors 'eye-to-eye', while others used their camera at different angles in order to create different effects. Viewers should, therefore, try to note what elements can be found relevant, interesting or unusual, whether images, colours or lighting, dialogues, special effects, soundtrack, or any other.

It should be remembered that films, like novels or short stories, tell a story. Therefore, we can analyse a film the way we would a novel. All the elements above mentioned contribute to telling the story. If we take the example of the soundtrack, musical scores have been widely used in a vast majority of Westerns (as well as for other films) and great composers (Korngold, Max Steiner in the 1930s and 1940s, James Horner, John Williams, Jerry Goldsmith in the 1980s and 1990s) have created now world-famous scores. Music in a film, especially a Western, is often associated with a certain atmosphere, a precise moment of the action, but also with some precise characters (for example the music accompanying 'Stands with a Fist' in *Dances With Wolves*, or the threatening drums and discordant chords representing the Indians in *They Died With Their Boots On...*). This is not very different from what the German composer Richard Wagner did with 'Leitmotiv' (a piece of music symbolising one character) in his opera work.

Then, not unlike new books, new films can be controversial. *Soldier Blue* and *Little Big Man* created a sensation in the 1970s because they showed Indians massacred by the US Army, which was very unusual in the Western tradition. Even *Cheyenne Autumn* did not go that far. Films, of course, can also be banned or censored or even generate violent reactions from people who think they should not be on screen at all...

There are rumours that the Western genre is on the rise again, thanks to Clint Eastwood and Kevin Costner among others. But the Westerns from the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s remain an essential element of cinematic culture, not just in the US.

Chapter Six

Immigration to North America

If we keep in mind that Indians were the first immigrants to America, having arrived from Siberia 30,000 years ago, it could be said that the Americas (North, Central and South) are indeed the continent of the exiles. From the 16th century up to the present day, the New World has attracted emigrants from all over the world, some embarking on what must have been like an adventure, while others were given no choice and were forced to leave.

In the case of North America, the different waves of immigrants have contributed over the centuries to giving American society its unmistakable character. While it used to be described as a 'melting-pot' where individuals of various geographical, social, ethnic or religious origins were supposed to assimilate and become alike, it is now more fashionable to speak of a 'salad bowl' where each community contributes its own flavour and characteristics to US society.

Immigration to the colonies of North America and later to the US can be divided as follows:

- 1 – the 'founders'
- 2 – the 1st wave ('colonial')
- 3 – the 2nd wave ('old immigrants')
- 4 – the 3rd wave ('new immigrants')
- 5 – the refugees of WWII and the Cold War
- 6 – the 4th wave: recent immigrants.

The differences between each wave or group of immigrants can be established thanks to their geographical and ethnic origins, but also the circumstances which led them to leave their respective native lands.

The 'founders': late 16th, 17th century

These were the first European immigrants, who founded the first colonies, mostly on the Atlantic seaboard, in the Caribbean and in what is now Canada. Mostly Spanish, French, Dutch, English and Danes, they came in the wake of the first explorers like Christopher Columbus, John Cabot or Jacques Cartier, often with royal charters granted to them by their respective monarchs.

In the thirteen colonies – the future thirteen original states of the US – the majority of settlers was clearly white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant (four out of five), hence the origin of the 'WASPs', long regarded as the racial and social elite of the US. And yet, religious diversity marked the thirteen colonies, despite the intolerance of a few Puritan settlements in New England. New Amsterdam, founded by the Dutch (later to become New York) became known for its tolerance and its cosmopolitan character.

The patterns of settlements differed from one another, as the reasons for emigrating⁵⁴. The obstacles to colonisation were a new, often unknown or hostile environment, the presence of Indians, and the rivalries between the various Europeans. To the white settlers should be added the first African slaves that were brought over from West Africa to work in the plantations of the South and the Caribbean.

The first wave: the 'colonials', 1680-1776

The immigrants of the 'first wave' came from Europe and West Africa. If the WASP element remained strong, it was already faced with Germanic and Celtic influx, plus French and Jews. The Africans did not come to the Caribbean and America of their own free will, being then enslaved to work on the plantations, victims of the 'triangular trade'⁵⁵.

The different ethnic groups in the first wave were the following:

- 1 – Scots-Irish, i.e. Protestant immigrants of Scottish origin, having settled in Ireland (particularly in the North) on lands confiscated from their Irish Catholic owners; these Scots-Irish are the typical example of 'Frontier'⁵⁶ settlers, advancing westward and shaping the 'pioneer' spirit; although these immigrants could be more aptly described as 'Anglo-Celtic', the fact they were white and Protestants helped with their adapting to the New World; they were the largest group in this wave
- 2 – Germans, also settling on the Frontier, but tending to stay grouped in their own settlement, speaking German and keeping German traditions; unlike the Scots-Irish who tended to push westward, German settlers stayed where they had founded towns or settlements, working hard on farms and businesses
- 3 – English, often deported convicts or indentured labourers⁵⁷, they usually adapted quickly to a still predominantly WASP society
- 4 – Irish, very often Catholics, they also came as indentured labourers; because of the lack of Catholic wives, they tended to assimilate rapidly in the colonial society
- 5 – Scots (from Scotland, not Ireland), followed the German pattern of settlement, staying grouped in communities, keeping their traditions and, in some cases, the Gaelic (especially in places like Nova Scotia⁵⁸, but in the thirteen colonies as well)
- 6 – French Huguenots (Protestants) and Jews, who settled in Atlantic ports but suffered from discrimination and vanished as distinct communities, by assimilation and integration
- 7 – Africans, mostly from West Africa, deported as slaves, mostly in the South and the Caribbean.

Before the Civil War, American Colonial society was still dominated by the English element, but they represented only 52% of the population (Indians not counted), while African slaves accounted for 20%.

The second wave: the 'old immigrants', 1820-1890

The War of Independence, the Napoleonic wars and the Anglo-American war of 1812 slowed immigration until it resumed around 1820. By that time, American society was definitely

⁵⁴ See Chapter One.

⁵⁵ The 'triangular trade' was the basis for early English colonial economy (see Chapter Eight).

⁵⁶ 'The 'Frontier' was the most extreme advance of white settlement. It was associated with conquest, adventure and danger.

⁵⁷ Indentured labourers signed a contract with a plantation owner who paid their passage across the Atlantic in exchange of three or four (or more) years of work.

⁵⁸ Gaelic is still spoken today in Nova Scotia.

dominated by ‘Anglo’ culture, if only by the language, although there were still a few German-speaking enclaves (Nova Scotia should not be counted here, as it was part of British America, future Canada).

The situation and conditions in Europe often pushed people out of the Old World into the New, particularly religious intolerance against Jews, poverty and hunger (affecting the Irish, especially after the Great Famine of 1845-47, as well as the Scots, evicted from the Highlands), while the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the economic transformations in Western Europe left thousands without jobs, especially in the countryside.

Mauk and Oakland (2002) give the following groups in order of size:

- 1 – Germans (including Jews fleeing Russian persecutions via Germany)
- 2 – Irish (see above)
- 3 – Britons (English, Welsh, Scots)
- 4 – Scandinavians (Swedes, Norwegians)

If there were pushing factors such as hunger, poverty, religious intolerance, unemployment, lack of land, there were also pulling ones, amongst which we should note:

- availability of land in the US (at the expense of the Indians), especially after the 1862 Homestead Act
- jobs in the developing American industries, in the building of railroads
- dramatic booms, like the California Gold Rush of 1849
- letters from relatives and friends already settled in the US and encouraging Europeans to come to the New World.

Other Europeans joined in this wave (Dutch and Swiss), while immigrants also came from Asia, notably China, and America (French Canadians). These immigrants often settled in the North East, the Frontier cities and California. If Britons had little difficulty adapting to an Anglicised society, notably few problems with language or religion, it was not so easy for the others. Scandinavians had to learn English, but, white and Protestant, they had no other major obstacle. Germans were regarded as hard-working, but their tendency to keep among themselves designated them as more alien than others, also because several of them were Catholics, while German Jews suffered from discrimination as well.

The Irish, Catholics, poor, were also discriminated against. Ron Howard’s film *Far and Away* shows what could be called an Irish ghetto on the Atlantic seaboard (Boston is still an ‘Irish’ city), where the Irish live among themselves. There were anti-Irish-riots and the Irish, often united by their religion under the leadership of their priests, formed a group apart⁵⁹. Irish looking for a job were often met with the infamous ‘No Irish need apply’ obstacle.

In the 1850s, anti-foreign agitation (‘nativism’) became a threat to newcomers, as the ‘American Party’ demanded that the number of years of residence necessary to become an American citizen be tripled. But the Civil War altered the situation, as the North in particular welcomed immigrants to work in factories or fight against the South.

American workers were often suspicious of immigrants, afraid that the latter would accept lower wages than longer-established workers. Racism added to this fear of unemployment and in 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act put an end to Chinese immigration. America was not quite a salad bowl yet.

⁵⁹ We are far from the election of the first Roman Catholic President of the US, J.F. Kennedy, in 1960, or today’s celebrations of Saint Patrick’s Day in the streets of American cities.

The third wave: the ‘new immigrants’, 1890-1930

The relative new prosperity of north-western Europe reduced the flow of immigrants from that part of the Old World⁶⁰, and by the early 20th century, four out of five immigrants were ‘new’ in terms of geographical origin, with a peak of one million immigrants per year before WWI.

We refer once again to Mauk and Oakland for the different groups in order of size:

- Italians (among whom we find the fictional Don Corleone, in *The Godfather II*, arriving at Ellis Island, New York City), trying to escape poverty
- Jews, mostly from Russia, escaping ethnic violence (pogroms)
- Poles
- Hungarians (both latter groups in search of jobs and ‘a better life’?)

Mauk and Oakland also mention ‘Mexicans, Russians, Czechs, Greeks, Portugese [sic], Syrians, Japanese, Filipinos...’

Obviously these newcomers did not qualify as WASPS, and the Italians, for instance, tended to stay together, not unlike the Irish. The pushing factors for this 3rd wave were not particularly different from that of the 2nd wave: socio-economic changes were now affecting central and eastern Europe, while Jews were increasingly victims of discrimination and massacres⁶¹. Pulling factors were slightly different, since land was less available than before and most jobs to be had were in the urban North East and Great Lakes Region. Some of these immigrants came only to earn enough money to enable them to come back to their country of origin and start their own business. Finally, Atlantic passages had become cheaper, thus facilitating emigration (as seen in the steerage – cheapest class – passengers on board *Titanic* in the 1997 film by James Cameron).

The formation of ethnic ghettos (Italian, Jewish) in overcrowded cities may have contributed to the rise of urban crime in American cities, and reactions to this new situation were twofold: on the one hand, it was said that ghettos enabled immigrants to ‘find their mark’ and assimilate progressively into the US society, while on the other hand one could hear calls for tougher restrictions on immigration, often fearing that ‘the melting-pot’⁶² would lead to a racially-mixed population, an idea which was abhorrent to those Americans who claimed that Anglo-Saxon people were superior to all others⁶³.

US policies took a turn towards restricting immigration with the following measures:

- 1891: opening of Ellis Island, where immigrants were screened before entering the US (seen in *The Godfather II*)
- 1921: Emergency Quota Act, reducing immigration to 375,000 per year, with quotas of 3% of the total of foreign-born residents in the US in 1910; this meant that if, for example, there were 10,000 Hungarian-born residents in the US in 1910, new Hungarian immigrants could not come in numbers above 3% of 10,000; this, of course, reduced the total number of ‘new immigrants’

⁶⁰ It did not stop altogether. And as late as the 1970s and 1980s, one could still see adverts in buses in Britain for removal companies catering for emigrants leaving Britain for the US, as well as Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

⁶¹ The pogroms in Russia were the most violent form of anti-Semitism, but at the same period, France was torn apart by the ‘Affaire Dreyfus’, when a French officer of Jewish origin was accused of spying, tried and condemned to prison in the penal colony of French Guiana. He was proven innocent and restored to his Army rank, but ‘l’Affaire’ left a particularly bitter memory in the country.

⁶² The expression apparently comes from the title of a 1909 play by one Israel Zangwill.

⁶³ This view was shared by a Socialist writer, Jack London, whose novel *The Valley of the Moon* (1913) praises the Anglo-Saxons and derides Portuguese immigrants to California.

- 1924: National Origins Act, lowering the quotas to 2% of each national background present in the US in 1890, which reduced the number of new immigrants even further, while Asian immigration was completely stopped by the Oriental Exclusion Act (1924).

Mauk and Oakland give the following figures as an example: British immigrants granted a visa in 1929 were 65,361, Italians 5,802 and Syrians 100. But since immigration from north-western Europe had slowed down, quotas for countries in this region were not always filled.

The refugees of WWII and the Cold War

The Great Depression did not help immigrants, as jobs were scarce in the US. The US government, however, adopted special laws to allow refugees from Europe, fleeing Nazi Germany or other dictatorships⁶⁴, while it permitted temporary immigration from Mexico during WWII to work the farms and allowed Chinese immigration in order to placate the Chinese nationalist government, allied of the US. Japanese residents, especially in Hawaii and in California, were interned for the duration of the war after the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941.

After 1945, refugees known as 'displaced persons', having lost everything in the conflagration of war in Europe, were admitted by special acts of Congress, and were later joined by refugees from Hungary after the failure of the insurrection in 1956 and the Soviet-led repression, and from Cuba, after Fidel Castro came to power in 1959. Furthermore, the racially-based quotas were abolished in 1952 in order to give the newly independent nations (or soon to become independent) of Africa and Asia a more favourable image of the US, in competition with the USSR⁶⁵.

In 1965, the Immigration Act made provisions for re-uniting families and defined new, fairer quotas, with 20% of all visas reserved for immigrants whose skills were needed in the US (this became known as the 'brain drain').

The fourth wave: 1965 until today

Immigrants in this wave have benefited from the dispositions of the 1965 Act (see above), with the following groups, given by order of size in Mauk and Oakland for 1999:

- 1 – Mexicans
- 2 – Filipino
- 3 – Chinese
- 4 – Vietnamese (following the Vietnam War in particular)
- 5 – Cubans⁶⁶
- 6 – Asian Indians
- 7 – Salvadorans
- 8 – Dominicans
- 9 – British
- 10 – Koreans.

What is remarkable about this fourth wave is that several immigrants are skilled and highly skilled workers and professionals (engineers and doctors), with a few others bringing capital

⁶⁴ By 1938, only the UK, the Irish Free State, France, Switzerland, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Czechoslovakia and Greece were democracies.

⁶⁵ At the same time, segregation was still in full force in the Southern states and the US regarded Apartheid South Africa as an ally.

⁶⁶ Cuban migrants (refugees, exiles) are evoked in Brian de Palma's film *Scarface* (1983).

to start business in the US. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and nationals from Central America or the Caribbean still take jobs unattractive to Americans.

The US authorities have attempted to control illegal immigration, not just from Mexico but from other countries as well, trying to solve the problem of illegal immigrants having resided in the US for four years, but also to make it more difficult for employers to hire illegal migrants.

The terror attack in September 2001 has resulted in a tightening of control and checks on immigrants and refugees...

To summarise...

America from 1492 has been populated by immigrants whose origins and reasons for leaving their homeland are varied.

The 'founders' came from the colonial powers of the 16th and 17th centuries (Spain, France, the Netherlands, England, Denmark). But those who came specifically to the thirteen colonies in North America were largely English and Protestant, hence the 'White Anglo-Saxon Protestant' majority in those days.

Immigrants in the first wave ('the colonials', thus named because immigrating during the colonial period, late 17th century to 1776) came mostly from the British Isles, with Protestant Scots-Irish, Protestant English and Scots, Catholic Irish. There was also a significant group of German immigrants (Protestants and Catholics), as well as small groups of French Protestants and Jews. If all these immigrants were white, they were not all Anglo-Saxon, but rather Anglo-Celtic or Germanic, and there were also a few Roman Catholics, thus reducing the white Anglo-Saxon majority to 52% of the population (Indians excluded). African slaves represented 20% of this immigrant population.

In the second wave (covering most of the 19th century), the Anglo-Celtic and Germanic character was confirmed with Germans, Irish, Britons and Scandinavians, but the Irish (Roman Catholics) found it more difficult to integrate American society than the other groups because of their religion, while Germans stayed apart. If the Irish stayed in cities and the East, the other immigrants participated in the conquest and settlement of the American West.

Factors partly explaining emigration from Europe/immigration to the US have been defined as 'push and pull':

- socio-economic and political circumstances (hunger, unemployment, political upheavals) pushed people out of their home country

- land, jobs, opportunities, letters from relatives and friends already settled in the US pulled immigrants towards the New World.

Anti-alien reactions (e.g. against the Irish) did not prevent immigrants from settling in the US, although Chinese immigration was halted in the late 19th century.

The third wave (late 19th century up to 1930) brought a radical change in the ethnic origins and the religions of the immigrants, as most of them were from southern, central and eastern Europe (Roman Catholic Italians, Russian Jews, Roman Catholic Poles and Hungarians...). Like the Irish before them, Italians and Jews tended to form ghettos in the cities of the North East and the Great Lakes Region.

This third wave was severely restricted by quota laws, giving each ethnic group a percentage calculated on their numbers in 1910 but later moved back in time to 1890, favouring the second wave but limiting the third wave, in an atmosphere of suspicion and racism, especially against non-whites and non-Protestants.

WWII and the Cold War brought significant changes, with the US taking refugees and displaced persons fleeing either Nazism in Germany or communism in central and

eastern Europe after 1945. The 1965 Immigration Act established fairer quotas, also in order to attract immigrants with technical and professional skills.

Since 1965, the profile of immigration has changed, with a dominance of Latin Americans and Asians, some of whom are already qualified when arriving in America and others import capital to start their own businesses. Illegal migrants crossing into the US via the Mexican border are still a problem, although different US administrations have attempted to regularise the situation of some of these migrants. The present context of terrorist threats, however, bears consequences on immigration...

A few films...

West Side Story, by Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise (1961); this screen adaptation of the celebrated musical is set in New York City and features two rival gangs, the 'Jets' (whose members proudly claim to be 'American', while many belong in fact to the 3rd wave, with Italians and Poles) and the 'Sharks', newly arrived from Puerto Rico and proud of by their Hispanic culture (but the Puerto Rican girls sound happier to be in America than the boys, at least in the scene where they sing 'I like to be In America')

America, America, by Elia Kazan (1963); the story of a young Greek who wants to emigrate to America in the last decade of the 19th century

The Godfather, I & II, by Francis Ford Coppola (1972-74); both films show the Italian community in New York from the arrival of young Vito Corleone before WWI to the 1960s; the passages set in the 1920s and 1930s in part II are most interesting

Scarface, by Brian de Palma (1983); a thriller set in the community of Cuban exiles in the 1980s

Once Upon a Time in America, by Sergio Leone (1984); another 'gangster' film, set in the inter-war years in the Jewish community of Brooklyn

The Untouchables, by Brian de Palma (1987); not unlike de Palma's *Scarface*, this film does not deal directly with the issue of immigration, but some of its characters, notably agent Malone (Sean Connery) and agent George (Giuseppe) Stone (Andy Garcia), are representatives of, respectively, the Irish and the Italian communities, the latter also represented by mobster Al Capone (Robert de Niro) and his henchmen

Far and Away, by Ron Howard (1992); an epic set in Ireland, in Boston and later in Oklahoma, showing land-hungry Irish emigrants as well as the Irish community in Boston

Titanic, by James Cameron (1997); a romantic story as well as an interesting re-creation of this tragedy at sea, the film shows several emigrants (Irish, Italians, Swedes, Syrians) on board the Atlantic liner

Gangs of New York, by Martin Scorsese (2002); the film is set in New York during the Civil War and shows the hostility towards Irish Roman Catholic immigrants; it also shows the 'New York Draft Riots' of 1863, where immigrants, mostly from Ireland, attacked Blacks whom they saw as competitors for jobs.

We should also note that the 1939 blockbuster *Gone With the Wind* (see Chapter Four) shows two types of immigrants: Scarlett O'Hara's father, Gerald, comes from Ireland and he tells his daughter about an Irishman's love for land, which they could only find in America at a time when most Irish Roman Catholics were landless tenants; Gerald has emigrated of his own free will (so are we given to understand from the film), but the slaves on Gerald O'Hara's plantation are descendants of forced emigrants, i.e. Africans deported mostly from West Africa to work on the plantations of the Caribbean and the colonies, later states, of North America.

Two little-known Swedish films ought to be mentioned in this chapter, as both deal with emigration to- and settlement in North America in the 19th century by a group of Swedish farmers:

Utvandrarna, by Jan Troell (1971) – *The Emigrants* – and *Nybyggarna*, by Jan Troell (1972) – *The New World* – (sequel to *The Emigrants*)

Last, we should mention an animated film, *An American Tail*, by Don Bluth (1986), about a Russian-Jew family of mice emigrating to America at the end of the 19th century; the film shows the harsh and often tragic conditions of emigration from eastern and central Europe at that time...

Chapter Seven

US Foreign Policy – 1867-1921

US foreign policy can be said to start with the birth of the new nation, when the American colonists received help from the French and the Spanish against their British colonial masters. If the period immediately following independence saw the USA at peace with the European powers still holding vast territories on the North American continent and in the Caribbean (Britain, Spain, France), the movement of westward expansion meant that the US had to confront the Europeans once again. French Louisiana, west of the Mississippi, was sold by Napoleon to the Americans, who fought Britain in 1812 over issues of borders and navigation, and Spain in 1818, thereby annexing Florida.

In the early part of the 19th century, however, the US was more preoccupied with exploring and securing the continent from the Mississippi to the Pacific (see Chapter Three). But in 1828, the US became bolder and claimed, with the ‘Monroe Doctrine’, that America should be ruled by Americans, while Americans should refrain from meddling in European affairs (including in European colonies in the Americas). In fact, the war against Mexico in 1846 was a conflict between two American powers, while the next disputes with Britain over the northern border of the US were solved by negotiations, not by war. But it had become clear that the US wanted control over as much of North America as possible, as it was claimed in ‘Manifest Destiny’ (i.e. ‘the obvious fate’ – see Chapter Three).

During the Civil War (1861-65), European powers like Britain and France were tempted to support the Confederacy (the South), but refrained from military intervention. After 1865, domestic issues (conquering and settling the West) dominated US politics, despite the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867. But if the US did indeed refrain from involvement in European affairs, it was faced with European powers in the Pacific and in China, as well as in the Caribbean, where the US adopted a more energetic policy of military intervention against Spain in Cuba.

WWI changed the situation and the US, for the first time in its history, sent US troops to fight in a European conflict, before reverting to a policy of isolationism which did not prevent the US from cooperating with other powers but was to change radically after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941...

Into the Pacific

In 1853, a US naval force under the command of Commodore Perry had anchored off the coast of Japan, where only the Dutch were allowed to trade under certain limitations. By signing a treaty with the Japanese the following year, Perry forced them to open their ports to American trade and offer asylum to shipwrecked American sailors, thus ending the Japanese policy of isolation. But we should remember that the Japanese were not colonised, nor did they allow the presence of foreign soldiers on their soil. In that way, they certainly got a better arrangement than the Chinese. It is not impossible that the Japanese also ceded to American muscled diplomacy in order to avoid an incident with the British, whose Royal Navy was, at that time, the first naval power in the world, and much more impressive than its US

counterpart. The opening up of Japan also signalled the beginning of Japanese modernisation and transformation into an industrialised, expansionist power...

After the Civil War in 1865 however, the USA needed peace with foreign powers in order to reconstruct the South but also to conquer and settle the West, which meant fighting the Indians of the Great Plains and the South West. The purchase of Alaska from Imperial Russia in 1867, therefore, was not very popular. It even strengthened Canadian nationalism⁶⁷ against possible annexation by the US. And yet, the US now looked towards the Pacific and to Hawaii in particular. But European powers (Britain, France, Spain and Germany after 1870) were also present in this vast area, and it took more than 50 years before Hawaii was finally annexed by the US (1840-1898). By the end of the 19th century, with the country now nearly all settled, Americans became aware that they could not stay away from imperial conquest. They saw European powers carving Africa (this became known as 'The Scramble for Africa') and they also realised that foreign markets had become important for US economy, hence the need for a strong navy, with naval bases on the sea-routes (in the West Pacific, Samoa was annexed in 1889, Wake Island the following year). The context of the late 19th century was also unashamedly 'white supremacist', with many British and Americans seeing themselves as 'superior' Anglo-Saxons whose duty it was to 'civilise' the non-whites. But the attraction of the Pacific for the US also resided in the fact that it was the way to one of the largest markets in the world: China. This vast empire had already been forced to open its ports and waterways to Britain and France⁶⁸, but most major powers in the late 19th century had acquired concessions and territories⁶⁹. The US, however, was not as keen on territorial conquests as the Europeans, and advocated the 'Open Door policy' in China, to prevent the other powers from annexing vast parts of the country that would then become closed to American trade. When Chinese nationalists known as 'Boxers' attacked the foreign legations in Peking (now Beijing) in 1900, US troops joined an international relief force (British, French, Russian, Japanese, German, Italian and Austrian) which crushed the Boxers and rescued the besieged legations.

The Spanish-American war

In the late 19th century, Spain still had a few colonies in the Caribbean, among which Cuba was most attractive to the US⁷⁰. Under the pretence of helping Cuban nationalists oppressed by their Spanish colonial masters, and using as a pretext the explosion of the US battleship *Maine* in the port of Havana, the US declared war on Spain in 1898, defeating the weakened colonial power in a matter of months, both on land and at sea. The US did not only 'liberate' Cuba and occupy Puerto Rico, but conquered Spanish possessions in the Pacific as well: the Philippines and the island of Guam thus became American territories. And despite its anti-colonial stance, the US had to fight in order to suppress a nationalist Filipino movement following annexation.

Cuban independence however was nominal and its economy and foreign policy were under US control, while the US Navy was granted a naval base, Guantanamo, which it has kept up to this day.

⁶⁷ In 1867, the British North America Act created the Canadian Confederation, which was to be the first dominion of the British Empire, with its own constitution and 'Responsible government' but retaining the British Monarch (by then Queen Victoria) as Head of State.

⁶⁸ This is the context of the 'opium wars' of 1839 and 1856.

⁶⁹ Notably the British (Hong-Kong), the French (the Yunnan), the Portuguese (Macau), the Russians (Port Arthur), the Germans (Tsing Tao), the Japanese (in Manchuria, in Korea)...

⁷⁰ Cuba, with its sugar plantations, had been attracting American expansionists, especially from the South, since well before the Civil War.

Latin America

When Theodore Roosevelt (Republican) became President in 1904⁷¹, he inaugurated a more active foreign policy, notably in Latin America. Adding to the Monroe Doctrine the 'Roosevelt Corollary', which justified US intervention in the affairs of Latin American States, he asserted the right of the US '...to the exercise of an international police power' (quoted in Jones, 1995). In 1903, the US had helped the people of Panama to rebel against their Colombian rulers in order to control this narrow stretch of land between the Atlantic and the Pacific, and starting to build the Canal in 1907, with the first steamer passing through in 1914. This interventionist policy in Latin American affairs was nicknamed the 'big stick' policy and has so far remained very much a reality⁷². In the early 20th century, the US exerted pressure on- and even sent troops to- Panama, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Haiti, and Mexico (notably during the insurrection led by Pancho Villa, between 1913 and 1920). One of the objectives of this policy was to replace European by American investment and secure as much control over the western hemisphere (North, Central and South America) as possible.

Onto the world stage...

Theodore Roosevelt served as a mediator between Russia and Japan in 1905⁷³, for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in the same year. Roosevelt was also involved in the Franco-German dispute over Morocco in 1906-07. But beyond limited military intervention (against Spain in 1898, in China in 1900, in Latin America up to 1917), the US remained shy of meddling with European powers or Japan, whose growing presence on mainland China was becoming a source of concern for the Americans. It should be remembered that the high rate of casualties during the Civil War had made the American people very reluctant to engage in major conflicts⁷⁴. With the outbreak of WWI in 1914, the situation was to change...

America and WWI

When the war broke out in 1914⁷⁵, Americans were very much in favour of neutrality, all the more since they were divided in their loyalties: German-Americans supported the German Empire, Irish-Americans were hostile to the British Empire, American Jews were hostile to the Russian Empire, Czech- and Polish-Americans were hostile to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while many Americans felt strong sympathies for Britain, France and Belgium but little for these nations' Russian ally...

But the Kaiser's⁷⁶ disregard for Belgian neutrality and later German submarine warfare damaged the relationships between Berlin and Washington. And if the US protested against British naval control for reducing American trade with the Central Powers (Germany, Austro-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire) almost to a standstill, the Wilson⁷⁷ administration was indeed pro-British, and the US supplied the allies (Britain, France, Italy...) with ammunitions and food, also granting them loans. When a German submarine sank the liner *Lusitania* in 1915, followed by other liners in the same year, with loss of American lives, American opinion turned even more anti-German. When a secret German telegram to the Mexican

⁷¹ Theodore Roosevelt served only one mandate, in 1904-1908.

⁷² The most obvious examples after WWII are US intervention against Fidel Castro in Cuba (1961) – which failed – the CIA-sponsored military coup by General Pinochet against the legally elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile (1973), plus intervention or at least involvement in the affairs of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Grenada in the late 1970s early 1980s (see Chapter Nine).

⁷³ The Russo-Japanese war was fought in the Far-East in 1904-05, ending by a Japanese victory.

⁷⁴ The wars against the Native Americans, cruel and brutal as they were, did not cost that many lives to the white men.

⁷⁵ Remember that all belligerent nations then thought the war would be over by Christmas 1914.

⁷⁶ 'Kaiser' was the German title for the Emperor, like the 'Czar' in Russia, both terms deriving from 'Caesar'.

⁷⁷ Woodrow Wilson (Democrat) served two terms as President, in 1912-1916 and 1916-1920.

government offering an alliance between Mexico and Germany was intercepted⁷⁸, decoded and passed by British Intelligence to the Americans, the US Congress declared war on Germany and sent up to 2 million men to the Western Front. Even if US troops saw action mostly during the last year of the conflict, their contribution did tip the balance in favour of Britain, France and their allies⁷⁹.

At the Peace Conference in Paris (1919), President Wilson tried to pass his 'fourteen points' for securing world peace. Point fourteen in particular made provisions for the creation of a 'League of Nations', one of whose future tasks was to be the settlement of disputes between member-states by negotiations and not by armed conflict⁸⁰. But on the 'home front', i.e. in the US, Republican opposition to the Treaty of Versailles (of which the League of Nations was a key point) was growing. With the presidential election of 1920 won by the Republican candidate Warren Harding⁸¹, the US did not become a member of the League and signed a separate peace treaty with Germany in 1921. Domestic issues (strikes, the 'Red Scare'⁸²) dominated US politics, and America reverted partly to its pre-WWI isolationism but could not stay away from international diplomacy altogether...

To summarise...

The US had to confront European powers in America from the very beginning of its existence, in order to secure its borders and to expand to the South, South West and West (see Chapter Three). But in 1823, the Monroe Doctrine was the first step in defining US diplomacy:

- 1) the US opposed new colonisation in the Americas (North, Central, South)*
- 2) the US opposed European involvement in the affairs of the different American nations (the US, Mexico, the newly independent states in South America...)*
- 3) the US accepted the remaining European colonies in the Americas and refrained from involvement in European affairs.*

The second step was 'Manifest Destiny', embodying the idea that it was the US's obvious fate to conquer and control the whole of North America, although the US and the British Empire reached a negotiated settlement on the question of the US northern border with British North America (future Canada).

US politics were dominated by the Civil War (1861-1865), the 'reconstruction' of the South (1865-1877) and the conquest and settlement of the West and South-West (from the 1860s to the late 1880s⁸³), so that American public opinion was not in favour of an imperial expansionist policy similar to that of Britain or France. The purchase of Alaska from the Russians (1867) was not popular, and it took until 1890 to see Hawaii annexed by the US.

By the end of the 19th century, however, Americans realised that they needed new markets for their developing economy and US expansionism overseas started in earnest in two directions:

⁷⁸ Germany promised that Mexico would recover its territories lost in the war of 1846, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona.

⁷⁹ The situation had become very uncertain in 1917, when the Russians stopped fighting and eventually signed a separate peace with Germany, following the October Revolution.

⁸⁰ Unlike its successor the United Nations, the League of Nations had no equivalent to the Security Council and no means to assemble a peace-keeping force if necessary.

⁸¹ Warren Harding served only one term, in 1920-1924.

⁸² The 'Red Scare' was the first anti-Communist campaign of repression in the US, when the authorities were convinced of the existence of a Bolshevik threat on American soil.

⁸³ The two symbolic dates for the end of the Indian Wars could be 1886 (Geronimo's surrender) and 1890 (the massacre at Wounded Knee); also see Chapter Five.

- 1) *the Pacific: the Americans needed naval bases on the sea-route to China and annexed Hawaii (already settled by American planters of sugar and pineapples) as well as the Samoa Islands and Wake Island in the 1890s; they also annexed the Philippines and the island of Guam, former Spanish possessions, after the Spanish-American war in 1898 (also see below)*
- 2) *the Caribbean: on the pretext of helping Cuban nationalists against their Spanish colonial masters, the US defeated the Spanish forces in Cuba and they also annexed Puerto Rico; Cuba became independent under close US control of its economy and foreign policy.*

The US, like the major European powers and the Empire of Japan, was drawn by China and its vast markets. But unlike Britain, France, Germany, Japan or Russia, the Americans refrained from annexing territories and advocated the 'Open Door' policy guaranteeing free access to Chinese territory and trading rights for all. Still, the US was now an imperial power, and its expansionist policies were motivated by trading interests as well as a feeling of racial superiority over the non-Anglo-Saxon peoples. The US even cooperated militarily with other imperial powers present in China to crush the revolt of the Boxers, in 1900.

Under the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt (1904-08, Republican), US foreign policy took a bolder and more aggressive turn. In order to promote and protect US interests in Central and South America, the new President added the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, stating explicitly that the US had the right to 'exercise...international police power' in the western hemisphere (i.e. Central and South America). US forces under Roosevelt and his successors (Taft, Wilson) intervened several times, notably in Panama (1903), and Mexico (1916).

Theodore Roosevelt also played a role in international diplomacy, notably by mediating between Russia and Japan in 1905, but the US still kept away from European affairs (point three of the Monroe Doctrine).

With the outbreak of WWI in 1914, the US under President Woodrow Wilson first proclaimed its neutrality, despite a growing sympathy for the allies (Britain, France, Belgium, Italy). US trade was affected by the war in the Atlantic, but the US also supplied the allies with weapons and food, even granting them financial loans. Germany's submarine warfare, with the loss of civilian lives (including US nationals), and German attempts to draw Mexico into the war contributed to the deterioration of American-German relations until the US declared war on Germany in 1917, bringing the Allies precious help in the last year of WWI. The US had finally disregarded the third point of the Monroe Doctrine.

President Wilson wanted the US to play a major role in world diplomacy and promote peace. He took part in the peace negotiations in Versailles, France, where he advocated a new world order characterised by free trade, freedom of the seas, right to self-determination and disarmament. Wilson also proposed the formation of a 'League of Nations' whose task it would be to implement this new world order.

Republican opposition at home was strong, however, and Congress did not ratify the Versailles Peace Treaty. Consequently, the US did not join the League of Nations and signed a separate peace treaty with Germany. This was a partial return to isolationism, although the US was now involved in international treaties and cooperated with other powers.

The inter-war situation and the outbreak of WWII were to bring a radical change.

A few films?

While US foreign policy from WWII until the present war in Iraq has supplied several films and televised series, the earlier period has been apparently far less inspiring for filmmakers.

Three often neglected films should be mentioned however, about American presence in China before WWII:

Fifty Five Days at Peking, by Nicholas Ray (1963); the film is set during the siege of the foreign legations in Peking (Beijing) by the Chinese nationalists (the 'Boxers') in 1900, and the Anglo-American 'special relationship' is already in evidence

The Sand Pebbles, by Robert Wise (1966); this little-known film follows the crew of an American gunboat patrolling the rivers and lakes of Southern China (Yunnan) in 1926, entrusted with the protection of US nationals on Chinese soil, on the background of the turmoil and rivalries between Chinese warlords and the growing Kuomintang nationalist movement

Seven Women, by John Ford (1966); the story of an isolated Christian mission in China, under threat from Chinese bandits.

US foreign policy in Mexico in the first decades of the 20th century serves as the (distant) background of such films as Jack Conway's *Viva Villa!* (1934) and Elia Kazan's *Viva Zapata!* (1952), the latter's screenplay written by John Steinbeck. US involvement in Mexican affairs at that time is obvious in the following films:

The Professionals, by Richard Brooks (1966); a group of four Americans enters Mexico to rescue the kidnapped wife of a wealthy rancher; two of them evoke their memories of fighting alongside Pancho Villa

The Wild Bunch, by Sam Peckinpah (1969); set in 1913, when Pancho Villa's rebellion in Mexico attracts American adventurers, as well as the attention of the attention of the US Army for the surveillance of the border

Old Gringo, Luis Puenzo (1989); another film set during Villa's insurrection, it shows the last days of the actual American journalist and writer Ambrose Bierce, who disappeared in Mexico in 1913, although his fate remains a mystery

Last but not least, *The Wind and the Lion* (1975), by John Milius, evokes an incident when two American nationals were kidnapped in Morocco by a Berber chieftain in 1904, prompting President Theodore Roosevelt to wield the 'big stick' and send warships and US Marines to North Africa, at a time when European powers (France, Britain, Germany) are all competing for control of Morocco. The film has taken a few liberties with history, but its two main actors, Sean Connery and Candice Bergen, are remarkable, with Brian Keith playing a credible Theodore Roosevelt.

Chapter Eight

African Americans

African Americans were unwilling partners in the settlement of the New World from a very early stage. Forcibly taken from their villages, torn apart from their families and communities, then locked on board slave-ships in terrible conditions, those of them who survived the crossing from West Africa to the Caribbean and North America were sold to planters.

Slaves were an integral part of colonial economy and trade not only because they were treated like any other commercial goods, but also because they worked on plantations in order to grow crops like cotton, sugar, tobacco, and rice for export to Europe. These Africans must therefore be considered as forced emigrants, but their contribution to American society and culture is indeed significant, particularly in the South, but also in large northern cities like New York and Chicago.

If President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and slavery was officially abolished in 1865 (13th Amendment), it did not make the freed slaves full citizens overnight. The black community had still a long and hard way to go before the US administration took steps in order to grant African Americans full civil rights and end segregation, which has not solved all problems, nor put an end to racism.

African Americans have made an outstanding contribution to American culture, particularly in literature, music and film.

Slaves...

Africans, mostly from West Africa, were actors in the development of the European colonies in the Americas from the early colonial period. The first Africans to reach the mainland of America came to Virginia in 1619. Bought or exchanged as slaves, they were an integral part of the triangular trade:

- 1 – Ships from England or New England brought commodities and goods (but particularly rum) to trading posts on the coast of West Africa (today's Guinea, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia...), to be exchanged for Africans
- 2 – these African were then transported across the Atlantic on board slave-ships, in terrible conditions, to be set to work on the plantations of the West Indies (Caribbean) and the southern colonies of North America, mostly growing sugar cane, rice, tobacco, cotton)
- 3 – these raw materials were shipped either to England or to New England, to be manufactured into commodities and goods to be sold or exchanged for Africans...

Africans were not the only ones to be enslaved. Irish Catholics, for instance, were deported by Cromwell to North America, in the mid-17th century, as indentured servants, a condition

hardly any better than slavery⁸⁴. European colonisers also enslaved Indians, but several of those died of smallpox, while later alliances between rival European powers and Indian tribes made this enslavement more difficult.

The number of slaves in North America increased not only because of the slave-trade, but also because the condition of slave was hereditary: children born of the union between slaves (or slave women raped by white men) were born in slavery. Mauk and Oakland note that if, in the early 1600s, Africans ‘were not at first enslaved’⁸⁵ (Mauk and Oakland, 2002), they were later ‘degraded to the status of property’ (*ibid*). They also note that ‘Some owners treated their slaves better than others, but all had ultimate power over what was theirs’ (*ibid*)... This simply means that slave-owners had power of life and death over their slaves. It also means that slaves had to work hard for no salary, while losing their identity, their names, their culture and being deprived of the most basic rights...

Until the Civil War...

Opposition to slavery became stronger during the American Revolution, when some Americans found it incompatible to claim freedom for themselves while keeping slaves⁸⁶. The northern states in particular opposed slavery as it was thought to inhibit immigration, and consequently the development of the country. Slavery in the North was gradually abolished, but blacks were segregated against. In the South, some slaves were freed, but slavery remained in force, although importation of slaves was banned in 1808, one year after the slave-trade had been abolished by Parliament for the British Empire, with the Royal Navy’s West Africa Squadron enforcing the new Act...

As we have seen in Chapter Four, the question of slavery divided the United States on humanitarian, political and economic grounds. It is important to remember that Lincoln, before 1861, was not willing to interfere with slavery in states where it was legal in order not to add to the country’s divisions. Lincoln’s objective was to keep the country together as ‘the Union’, not to abolish slavery. But with the war dragging on, and under pressure from abolitionists, Lincoln issued an Emancipation Declaration (1863) which would apply only to Confederate territories which were still resisting. It should also be remembered that blacks, including former and emancipated slaves, served in the Union armies. But emancipation did not bring a solution to the post-Civil War difficulties overnight.

Reconstruction in the South

The Southern legislatures complied only reluctantly with the demands from the Union government in order to be re-admitted in the Union. In particular, they did nothing to guarantee suffrage for a limited number of blacks who could qualify as voters. Furthermore, the southern states passed ‘Black Codes’, defining the rights of the freed slaves and keeping them in a relative state of subjection. Congress, however, passed the 14th amendment, which protected the blacks against these infamous codes.

The 13th Amendment of 1865 had abolished slavery, while the 14th (1868) gave citizenship to former slaves:

⁸⁴ Indentured labourers came to America on a contract and, at least in theory, had only a limited time to serve (four years on average). But on their arrival in America, they were sold to prospective employers. This is the context for the 1935 film *Captain Blood*, by Michael Curtiz.

⁸⁵ This is the only reference I have found to this ‘non enslavement’ of the early 1600s. It seems that in other European colonies at the time, notably the French, Africans were enslaved from the very start.

⁸⁶ The French revolutionaries made the same objection to allowing planters to own slaves in the French West Indies.

Section 1 All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside...
(quoted in Mauk and Oakland, 2002)

The 15th Amendment (1870) stated the following:

Section 1 The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of colour, race, or previous condition of servitude [i.e. slavery]

Section 2 The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislature.

(quoted in Mauk and Oakland, 2002)

Jones notes that there was no black governor in the South after the Civil War, with only two black senators and fifteen representatives, while there were rivalries between former slaves and those blacks who had been freed before the Civil War... What most blacks wanted was access to land-property, education and the right to vote. Some of them benefited from the Homestead Act, but most became tenants, while illiteracy regressed from 95% at the end of the Civil War to 81% in 1870 and 64% in 1890⁸⁷. Black colleges started teaching and training blacks, thus contributing to the emergence of new, better-off class of African Americans. As for voting, it seems that the black vote benefited the Republicans, as blacks were shepherded into voting for them thanks to the 'Union League'. As early as 1866, some Southerners reacted by creating the infamous Ku-Klux-Klan, terrorising blacks as well as Northerners and Republicans. The Klan was outlawed by 1871, by which date it had lost its strength, thanks to radical measures adopted by the Grant⁸⁸ administration.

By 1876, however, the Democrats were back in power almost everywhere in the South, having scared or intimidated black voters. And with the withdrawal of Union troops, so far providing some form of protection for the blacks, in 1877, the South was once again dominated by whites, while the Hayes⁸⁹ administration did little, if anything, for the blacks in the south.

White supremacy...

With the whites re-asserting their power in the South, whatever limited gains the blacks had made came under threat, most notoriously when the Supreme Court ruled as unconstitutional the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which guaranteed 'equal rights in theaters, inns and public conveyances' (Jones, 1995). This ruling meant that there was no longer any Federal protection against discrimination or segregation.

The second attack on black rights affected voting, when southern states adopted specific suffrage qualifications, mostly by way of tax and literacy tests which excluded a substantial number of blacks. Jones gives the following numbers of voters for Louisiana: '130,344 registered black voters in 1896' and 'only 5,320 in 1900' (Jones, 1995). These qualifications also affected poor whites, although special provisions were made for them.

Between 1887 and 1891, several southern states codified and institutionalised segregation in what became known as 'Jim Crow'⁹⁰ laws', upheld by the Supreme Court and

⁸⁷ Schools were segregated.

⁸⁸ Ulysses Grant, former Union Army general (see Chapter Four), was elected President in 1868 and re-elected in 1872.

⁸⁹ Rutherford B. Hayes (Republican), was elected in 1876.

⁹⁰ 'Jim Crow' may have come from 'Jump Jim Crow', a song and dance performed by a black-faced white comedian in the early 1800s.

developing the principle of 'separate but equal'⁹¹ and applying it to all sorts of facilities (public places, public transports, schools, hospitals, cemeteries...), while black ghettos became the target of racist violence marked by white mobs attacking blacks and by the infamous practice of lynching, with no white convicted until 1918, according to Jones. In the context of the late 19th and early 20th century, white racists could claim white superiority over other races, with Anglo-Saxon superiority over other whites.

And yet, living standards for blacks improved slightly, with an increase in land-property as well as black businesses. Since white-owned companies (banks, insurance) charged their black customers more than the whites, black-owned companies could offer the blacks cheaper services. Blacks also started migrating towards the northern states ('The Great Migration') and settling in large cities, where they lived in ghettos (like Harlem in New York City), often in dire poverty, and white-dominated trade unions as well as employers made it difficult for black men to find jobs, while black women were more easily employed as domestics. Segregation was not limited to the South and became generalised, with racial tensions often erupting in riots and violence

...And black resistance...

The blacks reacted to white supremacy in two ways: Booker T. Washington, on the one hand, advocated vocational and practical training, which he dispensed at Tuskegee College, Alabama in the late 19th and early 20th century. Washington was not in favour of a more academic type of education, which he seemed to think unsuitable for the blacks⁹² at the time. He even accepted segregation as inevitable and preferred economic improvement to political action.

Edward B. Du Bois, on the other hand, criticised Washington's attitude. According to Jones,

Du Bois argued that Washington's conciliatory approach was a betrayal of black rights and that his stress on industrial education ignored the needs of the 'talented tenth' who provided Negro leadership and might condemn blacks to permanently menial positions.

(ibid)

Jones points out that Washington was in fact politically active and cooperated with President Theodore Roosevelt⁹³ and he further argues that Washington's policy 'may have been the only effective one in an age of intense racial bigotry' (*ibid*).

Du Bois, together with other black and white activists, founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. With a predominantly white leadership, but an important black following, the NAACP fought for the abolition of segregation, equality of rights and access to education, plus the enforcement of the 14th and 15th amendments, marking a few points when the Supreme Court invalidated decisions taken by states or cities in favour of segregation. The National Urban League, nearer Booker T. Washington, worked for the improvement of urban blacks, especially in the North.

⁹¹ There were similar developments at the same time in South Africa, by then a British possession, where, in the 1930s, the term 'separate development' was coined by the South African Bureau for Racial Affairs...

⁹² In his novel *Prester John* (1910), Scottish author John Buchan speaks of a 'native training college' in South Africa established to give the 'Kaffirs' (a derogatory term for 'natives') 'the kind of training which fits them to be good citizens of the state', with 'technical workshops' and 'experimental farms' to teach black Africans 'modern agriculture'. Buchan's hero, David Crawford, is explicit about the college being 'no factory for making missionaries and black teachers'.

⁹³ Theodore Roosevelt (Republican) became President in 1904.

Blacks served in the US forces sent to Europe from 1917 and, on their return home, resented even more segregation and discrimination⁹⁴, and some blacks turned to a more radical movement, the Universal Negro Improvement Association of Marcus Garvey, who advocated a 'back-to-Africa' policy in the early 1920s. Black culture, especially music (blues and jazz), became more prominent and gained some recognition, while black writers like Langston Hughes expressed in prose and poetry the growing rebellion of the black community against segregation and injustice.

The Great Depression in the 1930s hit the blacks hard, with two unemployed blacks for one white. Franklin D. Roosevelt⁹⁵ stayed shy of granting civil rights to the blacks in order to keep the support of Democrats in the South but his New Deal⁹⁶ policies won the Democrats the votes of the blacks, who so far had supported the Republicans. A few blacks were recruited in the new administration and associated to the New Deal agencies.

A second breakthrough came during WWII on the domestic front, as many blacks found jobs in the North and West and even managed to obtain from the Roosevelt administration that defence projects should be desegregated, although this was not enforced in the South. One million blacks served in the armed forces, in segregated units, although some white officers refused to allow them in combat. This situation showed a flagrant contradiction with America's goal of fighting for freedom and democracy against Nazi racism. The Japanese often used this contradiction in their propaganda, asking in a radio broadcast 'why [Roosevelt] was segregating Negroes' when he had 'stated recently that he was against race discrimination' (quoted in Horne, 2004). And Ghandi put it to Roosevelt in these terms:

...the Allied declaration that the Allies are fighting to make the world safe for freedom of the individual and for democracy sounds hollow so long as India and, for that matter, Africa are exploited by Great Britain and America has the Negro problem in her own home...
(quoted in Horne, 2004)

The NAACP saw an increase in its membership during the war years, but a growing number of blacks was becoming frustrated with the association's not always successful legal battles. A new organisation, the Congress for Racial Equality, was founded in 1943, deriving its inspiration from the non-violent tactics used to great effect by Gandhi and the members of the Indian National Congress in India.

Post-war years: the Civil Rights

President Truman⁹⁷ managed to end segregation in the armed forces in 1948, but his other attempts in favour of civil rights were resisted by the pro-segregation factions. Racial violence erupted again, especially in the South but in 1954, the Supreme Court reversed its 1896 decision to uphold segregation at school under the principle of 'separate but equal'. Desegregation of schools was resisted by southern states, which led to the intervention of US paratroops to escort black pupils to school in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. In the same year, Congress passed the first Civil Rights Act in order to secure justice for blacks denied the right

⁹⁴ This situation is comparable to the Indian and African soldiers of the British forces, or the African and Indochinese soldiers of the French forces.

⁹⁵ Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Democrat) was first elected in 1932, in the difficult years of the Great Depression, then re-elected for three successive mandates in 1936, 1940 and 1944.

⁹⁶ Roosevelt New Deal policy was marked by a series of measures intended to restore US economy and employment, while also providing relief to the poorest. It was unusual in the US, as it meant state intervention in economic matters.

⁹⁷ Harry Truman (Democrat) served as Vice-President under Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom he succeeded when Roosevelt died in 1945. Truman was elected President in 1949 and served a second mandate until 1953.

to vote, reinforced by a second Civil Rights Act in 1960. But such measures were resisted by local authorities, particularly in the south.

It was up to the blacks themselves to act. History has kept the gesture of defiance by Rosa Parks, in Montgomery, Alabama, 1 December 1955, when she refused to give her seat on a local bus to a white passenger and to move to the coloured section at the back of the bus. Parks was not the first to refuse to do so, but her refusal became the symbol of Civil Rights activism, followed by a campaign of boycott of local buses by black residents, led by Dr Martin Luther King Jr. Boycott and passive, non-violent, resistance paid off, and in 1956 the Supreme Court ruled that segregation of bus passengers was unconstitutional. Other, similar actions led to desegregation of public places, hotels, restaurants, parks in the 1960s. The international context of decolonisation, particularly in Africa, gave African Americans pride and confidence. In 1963, Dr M. L. King led a march of more than 200,000 people to Washington, when he gave his famous 'I have a dream...' speech.

Under the Kennedy⁹⁸ administration, blacks were appointed as federal judges or ambassadors, but the President was slow in taking decisive action, even if he sent troops to protect black students when they enrolled at the Mississippi State University. White segregationists reacted with violence, attacking Civil Rights campaigners, bombing a Baptist Church in Birmingham with the loss of four lives. White governors like George Wallace of Alabama tried to stop blacks from marching or enrolling at universities, using force and repression, but this only prompted Kennedy to present a civil-rights bill to Congress, which became an Act in July 1964, nearly one year after Kennedy's death. This Act prohibited segregation and discrimination and represented a non-negligible improvement for the African Americans, though not in economic terms. Jones (1995) notes that 'The Black unemployment rate was still twice the national average' and 'nearly a third of the black population lived below the poverty line'.

A more radical black response

Young black activists, frustrated at the still limited impact of the Civil Rights campaign, distanced themselves from the NAACP and Martin Luther King and turned to organisations advocating more radical action, like the Black Muslims (with Malcolm X), the Black Panthers (Eldridge Cleaver), and the Students Coordinating Committee (Stokely Carmichael), formerly Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Jones (1995) notes that

black-power advocates were agreed in demanding separatism rather than integration, in stressing self-help rather than collaboration with white liberals, and in being ready to contemplate violence...

This was indeed a time of violence. While the US was at war in Vietnam⁹⁹, black ghettos erupted in violent riots (notably Watts, in Los Angeles, 1965, Chicago, 1966, Newark, Detroit, 1967), and prominent black leaders were assassinated (Malcolm X, 1965, Martin Luther King, 1968). The Johnson¹⁰⁰ administration continued fighting discrimination, not least by adopting 'positive discrimination' but the cost of the Vietnam War limited funding for social action. Despite a sizeable black middle-class, African Americans are still more affected by unemployment than whites and still face discrimination, particularly in housing.

⁹⁸ John Fitzgerald Kennedy (Democrat) became the 35th President – and the first Roman Catholic – in 1961. He was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, in 1963.

⁹⁹ Jones (1995) writes that the percentage of black soldiers in Vietnam was 18% when in fact blacks represented 11% of the American population.

¹⁰⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson (Democrat) served as Vice-President under Kennedy, whom he succeeded after Kennedy was murdered. He was elected President in 1964.

Mauk and Oakland note however that residential desegregation has been more noticeable in the South, so that African Americans now move to this region, contrary to their previous migration northward.

African Americans have also made their way into the establishment, and we should bear in mind prominent politicians and officials, like Rev. Jesse Jackson (ex candidate for the Democratic nomination at the presidential election in 1984 and 1988), General Colin Powell, who became US Secretary of State (responsible for foreign affairs) in 2001, replaced by Condoleezza Rice in 2005.

The recent nomination of Barack Obama as Democratic candidate for the presidential election of 2008 is yet another step on the long way of the African Americans, but such incidents as the Rodney King beating in 1991, when a black man was arrested and severely beaten by Los Angeles police officers, should remind us that the heritage of slavery, as well as of discriminatory and segregationist policies, is still a reality in American society.

African American contribution to culture: a few among many names

Music

Scott Joplin, Memphis Slim, Bessie Smith, Big Bill Bronzy, Sonny Boy Williamson, Mississippi John Hurt, Reverend Gary Davis, Mahalia Jackson, Duke Ellington, Paul Robeson, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Muddy Waters, B.B. King, Chuck Berry, Miles Davis, John Lee Hooker, Ray Charles, Harry Belafonte, James Brown, Jimmy Hendrix, Tina Turner, Stevie Wonder...

Literature

Richard Wright, Toni Morrison, Langston Hughes, Alice Walker, Alex Haley, Maya Angelou...

Film

Sydney Poitier, Spike Lee, Morgan Freeman, Hale Berry, Oprah Winfrey, Danny Glover, Whoopi Goldberg, Will Smith, Eddie Murphy, Denzel Washington, Laurence Fishburne, Bill Cosby, Forest Whitaker...

To summarise...

The vast majority of Africans forcibly brought to America lived and worked as slaves, mostly in the southern colonies and later states, deprived of any basic rights, treated like merchandise, always at the mercy of their owners. Although the Civil War was not fought solely over the issue of slavery, President Lincoln abolished it in 1863.

If the newly emancipated slaves enjoyed at first a certain freedom, the southern states quickly reasserted the dominance of the whites and passed restrictive and discriminatory measures in order to prevent most blacks from voting, while schools, hospitals, public places and transport became segregated. Although their overall condition slowly improved from the time of slavery, African Americans in the late 19th century were poorly educated, hardly qualified, with very many of them living in poverty. Those of them who migrated to the northern cities were not particularly welcome there, especially since they had to compete with white workers whose attitude was often hostile. They lived in ghettos, in often squalid conditions.

With black businesses, churches, press and schools developing nevertheless, African Americans started to fight for their rights, with some, like Booker T. Washington, opting for trying to accommodate the whites by cooperating with them as much as possible, while

others, like Du Bois, organised themselves in order to take legal action to challenge segregation and injustice through the NAACP. The African Americans who had fought during WWI found it even more difficult to be discriminated after having risked their lives for their country, and this may have fuelled more radical movements like Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association in the early 1920s, while black culture became more visible, particularly in music and literature.

The Great Depression changed the voting patterns, with African Americans now turning to the Democrats of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. But despite the desegregation of the armed forces in 1948, official segregation was still very much in force in the 1950s, when African Americans turned to the non-violent tactics of passive resistance of the Congress for Racial Equality. These tactics started paying off in the late 1950s and early 1960s, not without violent reactions from some whites, especially in the South. Such violence and white resistance determined President Kennedy to present a civil rights bill to Congress in 1963, but many young African Americans, disaffected by the legalist approach of the NAACP or the non violence of the Congress for Racial Equality, turned to more radical forms of action, while large American cities experienced violent racial riots. Violence marked the 1960s also with the murder of two prominent figures of black activism: Malcolm X (1965) and Martin Luther King (1968).

The cost of the Vietnam War did not allow the development of social programmes and up to this day, the African American community has a higher unemployment rate than the national average. African Americans now count a few high-ranking figures in the political establishment as well as in Federal institutions, from the Rev. Jesse Jackson to Barack Obama, while American society still bears the scars of slavery and segregation.

A few films...

Prominent among African American film-makers is Spike Lee, whose filmography is impressive. Although only one of his films, *Malcolm X*, is mentioned in the very short list below, most of them would be relevant for a study of African American cinema. Also see the chapter on the Civil War for films on African Americans.

In the Heat of the Night, by Norman Jewison (1967); a black police officer (played by Sydney Poitier) investigates a murder in a Mississippi town together with the local Chief of Police, white and prejudiced

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, by Stanley Kramer (1967); a young white American woman from a liberal upper-middle class family is engaged to a young African American Doctor; she is going to introduce him to her parents, who are unaware of the fact he is black; the film is now a bit dated, but it had a significant impact at the time of its release; it is also worth watching for the performance of the actors: Sydney Poitier, Katharine Hepburn and, in his last role, Spencer Tracy

The Color Purple, by Steven Spielberg (1985); an adaptation of the novel by Alice Walker, on African American women in the early 20th century

Driving Miss Daisy, by Bruce Beresford (1989); this film, based on the relationship between a southern elderly lady and her black driver, is set during the post WWII years until 1973

Malcolm X, by Spike Lee (1992); a powerful and well-documented biopic on the life of Malcolm X, the film gives an insight into black militancy in the crucial 1960s

Love Field, by Jonathan Kaplan (1992); set in the tragic days of Kennedy's assassination, the film tells of the unexpected friendship between a white housewife mourning the dead President, and a black man travelling with his daughter

Beloved, by Jonathan Demme (1998); an adaptation of the novel by Toni Morrison, set in post Civil War Ohio

Chapter Nine

US Foreign Policy: 1921-the present day

As we have seen in Chapter Seven, the USA was initially concerned by domestic affairs in order to control as much of the North American continent as possible. While trying not to antagonise the still powerful British Empire, the Americans had less scruples with the Mexicans and the Spaniards. By the end of the 19th century, the US had become an actor in international diplomacy and its participation to the conflict in the last months of WWI on the side of the Allies marked a break with its isolationist policies, to which it reverted only partially in 1921. From that date however, the US became a major actor on the international stage, and even more so after 1945 when becoming a superpower and a rival to the Soviet Union.

Since 1945, the US has been involved on every continent, either through direct military intervention (as in Korea, Vietnam and Iraq) or through client forces (as in Africa or in Afghanistan under Soviet occupation). With the end of the so-called ‘Cold War’ against the ‘Eastern Bloc’ (the Soviet Union and its allies), the US claim to victory has been shadowed by the situation in the Middle-East, in Israel and Palestine, but also in Iraq and Afghanistan, while North Korea is still regarded as a ‘rogue state’ by the US administrations. In Central and South America, Cuba and Venezuela in particular defy US traditional involvement in what used to be regarded as ‘US backyard’.

The inter-war period

Despite their isolationist tendencies, Americans were in favour of world peace and disarmament and, although not a member of the League of Nations, the US sent observers to the League’s meetings and cooperated with it for a few non-political questions.

The US passed treaties with other powers, Britain, Japan, France and Italy, on the question of naval sea-power, in order to avoid a costly expansion of the battle fleets (1921). The Americans also came into agreement with the major powers present in China, in order to maintain the ‘Open Door’ policy. In 1928, the US and 61 other nations signed the Kellogg-Briand¹⁰¹ Pact, outlawing war, although no disposition in this commendable initiative provided the signatories with the means of enforcing it.

The US also changed its policy towards Latin America by refraining from military intervention and preferring negotiation and diplomacy, thus changing from the ‘big stick’ to the ‘good neighbor’ (American English spelling).

In the Far East, however, Japanese ambitions in China became more and more alarming: in 1931 and 1932, the Imperial Japanese Army seized control over Manchuria (in Northern China), establishing the puppet state of Manchukuo, and attacked Shanghai, only to be condemned – but not stopped – by the League of Nations, and in spite of the dispositions of US-signed treaties. It was in fact the Japanese who were to propel the US into WWII.

Armed neutrality

The US had become increasingly worried about Japanese expansionism in the Far East, particularly in China. In 1937, the situation had turned into a full-scale war between the two

¹⁰¹ Frank Kellogg was US Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs Minister); Aristide Briand was his French counterpart.

Asian powers, while in Europe and Africa, Germany was busily re-militarising, the Italians had attacked and conquered Ethiopia and Spain was torn apart by the Civil War. But even when an American gunboat, the *Panay*, was sunk by Japanese planes near Nanking, in China, US public opinion was not at all in favour of military retaliation and even demanded the withdrawal of US naval forces from China.

When war broke out in Europe in 1939, the US government adopted the same attitude as in 1914 and declared its neutrality, confident that Britain and France would defeat Nazi Germany, while several Americans were totally opposed to war¹⁰² and voiced their opposition through the 'America First Committee'. France's defeat in May-June 1940 and the following Battle of Britain convinced President Franklin Delano Roosevelt¹⁰³ that Germany and Italy could represent a threat to US interests and he managed to give the British support while maintaining neutrality. As for WWI, American public opinion was divided over the issue of entering the war or not. But Roosevelt committed his country increasingly to military action, especially from early 1941, by having Atlantic convoys bound for Britain protected by the US Navy as far as Iceland (occupied by US Marines in agreement with the Icelandic government), while also reporting German submarines to the Royal Navy. By October 1941, the US Navy and the German Kriegsmarine were very much at war¹⁰⁴, despite the absence of official hostilities between the two countries.

The Japanese attack: America in WWII

The Japanese, meanwhile, had taken advantage of the French and the Dutch being defeated by the Germans in Europe to threaten French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). When they forced the French Vichy¹⁰⁵ government to grant them bases in Indochina, the US retaliated by banning oil exports to Japan, followed by the British and the Dutch. Since Japan had only limited reserves of oil, it meant that the Japanese would have either to negotiate with the US – which meant withdrawing from China and Indochina – or fight, while Roosevelt was not ready to make concessions. It has been argued that he was so much in favour of entering the war that he chose this course of action so as to provoke the Japanese into striking, or that he even knew in advance of the Japanese strike but did nothing to prevent it in order to unite the nation and go to war. If that was so, Roosevelt's calculation paid off on 7 December 1941, when a surprise attack by Imperial Japanese planes launched from aircraft-carriers destroyed or damaged several warships and cruisers at anchor in Pearl Harbor...

On 8 December, Congress passed a resolution declaring that a state of war existed with Japan, and on 11 December, Japan's allies, Germany and Italy, declared war on the US. American soldiers fought in the Pacific, North Africa, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, China and Burma, while US industries and shipyards provided the allies (including the Soviet Union) with weapons, ships, airplanes, tanks, lorries, ammunition and all necessary supplies. Unlike its allies, the US did not suffer any attack on its soil, apart from Hawaii in 1941 and its dependencies and possessions in the Pacific. US involvement in WWII was to prove crucial in changing American foreign policy and abandoning isolationism.

¹⁰² Most prominent among them was Charles Lindbergh,

¹⁰³ Franklin D. Roosevelt (Democrat) served four consecutive mandates, in 1932-1936, 1936-1940, 1940-1944, 1944-1945, but died shortly after beginning his fourth.

¹⁰⁴ Two US destroyers were attacked in the same month, with one, the *Reuben James*, sunk, and a total of 126 lives lost.

¹⁰⁵ After the French defeat in 1940, the French government was located in Vichy, in Central France. It accepted collaborating with the Nazis, while also suppressing democracy and establishing a dictatorial regime under Marshall Pétain. Meanwhile in London, General de Gaulle was carrying on the fight against Germany...

Pearl Harbor

The attack on Pearl Harbor started in earnest shortly before 08.00 AM on Sunday 7 December 1941, without any declaration of war. Japanese diplomats in Washington had been instructed to negotiate with the US State Department (Foreign Affairs) while the Imperial Japanese Navy was planning the attack. On 6 December, while the Japanese naval force was on its way to Hawaii, the Japanese Embassy in Washington received a note which was to be delivered to the US Secretary of State Cordell Hull shortly before the first air strike, leaving the US forces little time, if any, to react. But since the note was encoded, it had first to be deciphered and when it was eventually presented to Cordell Hull in the early afternoon of 7 December, the attack had already started (Hawaii and Washington are in different time zones). Even though US intelligence had deciphered Japanese signals, it was impossible to know where the Japanese would strike; the Americans thought that British Malaya, Dutch East Indies and the Philippines would be the most likely targets. These territories were indeed attacked by the Japanese forces, but Pearl Harbor was the objective of the air raid evoked by the films *Tora! Tora! Tora!* and *Pearl Harbor*. It had been carefully planned for several months and partly inspired by a successful British air raid on the Italian fleet at anchor in Taranto in 1940. The Japanese attack, despite its indisputable audacity, failed to destroy any of the US aircraft carriers (they were at sea by then) and instead of forcing the US to negotiate, it united the Americans behind Roosevelt, who met with no opposition to taking his country into WWII.

Following Pearl Harbor, the Doolittle raid (evoked in *Pearl Harbor*) did indeed take place in April 1942 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Doolittle. Although the American bomber-planes could not do much damage, they hit their targets in Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, Kobe and a few other cities nevertheless, before flying on to China or to Soviet Russia. The impact on the Japanese General Staff, however, was considerable and prompted Admiral Yamamoto (who had masterminded the attack on Pearl Harbour) to launch an amphibious assault on the island of Midway, west of Hawaii, in early June 1942. But the US Navy knew that Midway was to be the target and, through a combination of luck and strategy, managed to sink the four aircraft carriers of the Japanese task-force to the loss of one US carrier.

Although it would take three more years and two atom bombs to force Japan into surrender, Midway was the turning point in the Pacific, after which the Japanese were increasingly on the defensive and never regained the initiative, despite their undeniable fighting spirit. This is why Nurse Evelyne's voice-over in *Pearl Harbor* saying that after the Doolittle Raid the Japanese began 'to fall back' is inaccurate. On the contrary, it renewed their aggressiveness and made them launch the ill-fated attack on Midway.

The aftermath of the war in Europe

The 'special relationship' between the US and the UK was not always as solid as propaganda would make us think. Many Americans, including senior officers in the armed forces¹⁰⁶, were anti-British, while others did not always see eye to eye with their British allies on points of tactics or strategy. Yet, British and Americans also realised that combining their respective strengths and coordinating their strategies were keys to victory.

More importantly, the Americans were not in favour of seeing the now weakened colonial powers (the UK, France, the Netherlands) come back to the status quo of pre-1939. Americans posed as anti-colonialists having freed themselves from British colonial rule during their War of Independence. The US, for example, favoured the independence of India, and resented Churchill's policies in Europe, while keeping him aside from the negotiations with the Soviet Union. The US also kept the Free French at bay, and the relations with General De Gaulle were often difficult¹⁰⁷. The post-war years, however, dampened the US anti-colonial stance.

¹⁰⁶ Like General 'Vinegar Joe' Stillwell, in south-east Asia.

¹⁰⁷ Part of De Gaulle's policy was based on rallying the French Empire to the Free French and make therefore a significant contribution to the war effort against the Axis.

The real danger for the US became the Soviet Union and its powerful Red Army occupying not only parts of Germany and Austria but also most of eastern and central Europe. Despite the assurances given by Stalin at Yalta in early 1945 on democratic elections, between 1945 and 1949 all countries under Soviet occupation (Austria excepted) became communist states (Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany¹⁰⁸), with the USSR increasing its size, notably at the expense of Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia, while the Baltic states had been incorporated in the Soviet Union since 1940. Albania and Yugoslavia had also become communist states but the latter was less in the orbit of Moscow.

In view of this Soviet takeover¹⁰⁹ of a significant part of Europe and of Soviet backing of communist guerrillas in Greece as well as pressure on Turkey for territorial concessions, the US offered economic assistance through the 'Marshall Plan' to European countries devastated by war and on the brink of becoming communist-led (the Italian communist party, for example, was then very strong). When the US, Britain and France decided to reconstruct a German state in 1948 that would benefit from the Marshall plan as well, the Soviet blockaded Berlin, which was then supplied by US, British and French planes. The situation in Europe was very fragile and western nations between 1948 and 1949 concluded a defensive alliance, to which the US and Canada also adhered (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation – NATO). This was a formal sign that the US had abandoned isolationism. It also signalled an escalation in the nuclear and conventional arms race between the two super-powers, weakening their economy and leading them to later agreements on arms limitations. And despite US strong vocal support for freedom for countries in the Soviet bloc, the Americans refrained from action when Moscow ordered military intervention in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968) or when Poland's communist government imposed martial law on the country in 1983.

With the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the US claimed victory, and several ex-communist states have since then joined the EU but also NATO, or have applied for membership. This is upsetting the relationships between the US and Russia, as recently seen with Russian intervention in pro-US Georgia, followed by a visit of the US fleet in Georgian waters, to which Russia has retaliated by sending bomber planes to Venezuela, all in the summer of 2008...

Containment policies in Asia

With the communist takeover in China in 1949, US foreign policy was mostly concerned with finding allies (NATO, but also the Organisation of American States, and later, in 1954, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation), and containing communism in East Asia, not least by stationing troops in occupied Japan.

In 1950, North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel separating Korea into the communist north and the pro-American south. The United Nations¹¹⁰ gave a mandate for military action, with a US-led international force (with US troops contributing 48% of the total forces). In spite of initial success, Chinese military intervention brought back the UN forces to the 38th parallel. This situation has hardly changed since, despite timid talks between North and South Korea.

The three remaining colonial powers in South East Asia (Britain, France and the Netherlands) each fought a war against nationalists respectively in Malaya (now Malaysia),

¹⁰⁸ These countries formed a military alliance, the 'Warsaw Pact', with the Soviet Union. Albania was a member until 1961.

¹⁰⁹ The term 'Iron Curtain' was used by Churchill in 1946 to describe the new situation in Europe where the Soviet sphere was growing.

¹¹⁰ The UN organisation was elaborated during WWII (Declaration of the United Nations in 1942) and started its business in 1945 in San Francisco, under its first Secretary General, Norwegian Trygve Lie.

Indochina (now Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) and the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). Softening its former anti-colonial stance, the US did not object to these wars, even supporting them, especially since nationalists in Malaya and Indochina were dominated by Chinese- and Soviet backed communists. British and Commonwealth forces fought from 1948 until 1960, with independence granted to Malaysia in 1957, while Indonesia became independent as early as 1949. French Indochina, however, was another matter.

France was less willing than Britain to decolonise and refused to make concessions to Vietnamese nationalists under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh¹¹¹, thus starting a war in 1946, ending tragically in 1954. Not unlike Korea, Vietnam was separated into a communist north and a pro-western south at the 17th parallel. But in the 1950s, a guerrilla war started in the south, opposing the communist Vietcong (backed by North Vietnam) to South Vietnamese regular units. South Vietnam received support from the US, first with military advisers, then with US troops¹¹², backed by US massive air raids on North Vietnam. In 1967, there were 500,000 US troops in Vietnam, but no end to the fighting was in sight, and President Nixon¹¹³ started disengaging American forces. By 1973, there were no US forces left in Vietnam and in 1975, this tragic and costly conflict ended with a North Vietnamese victory and the reunification of the country. The war had cost Vietnam (North and South) approximately two millions dead (military and civilians), while there were more than 58,000 US dead and 303,000 wounded, with 2,000 missing in action.

Latin America

US foreign policy had moved from the 'big stick' of Teddy Roosevelt to the 'good neighbour' of the inter-war years. In the 1950s and 1960s, the fear of communism spreading to America's 'own backyard' prompted the Kennedy administration into trying to help Latin American countries to develop into prosperous and stable, if not always democratic, states. But this was taken as a sign of disguised US imperialism and did not prevent Fidel Castro from overthrowing the corrupt government of Batista in Cuba, in 1959. This situation deteriorated into an attempted counter-revolutionary invasion, which failed ('the Bay of Pigs fiasco', in 1961), while Castro strengthened his links with the Soviet Union. In 1962, the US and the USSR came on the brink of direct conflict when the US demanded that Soviet missiles on Cuban soil be dismantled. Diplomacy prevailed after a ten-day crisis, the missiles were dismantled and the US pledged not to attack Cuba.

US presence and influence over Latin American countries has remained strong up to this day, marked by tragedies like the CIA-backed military coup by which overthrew the legal government of President Allende of Chile in 1973 and ushered in a hard-line right-wing regime under the dictatorship of General Pinochet. In the 1980s, the Reagan¹¹⁴ administration gave support to 'Contra' rebels fighting the Sandinista government of Nicaragua, after secretly selling arms to Iran, in contradiction with official US foreign policy, and three years later US troops landed on the Caribbean island of Grenada and deposed its left-wing government. In 1989, US forces invaded Panama and removed Dictator Manuel Noriega, as he was no longer friendly to his former US ally. The US has also been long criticised for supporting dictators in Latin America while claiming to fight for democracy. The present relationship between the Bush administration and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez is yet another example of US potential involvement in the affairs of an independent country in this part of the world. President Chávez has reportedly asked the US Ambassador to leave,

¹¹¹ Ho Chi Ming had led anti-Japanese resistance during the war with the support of the American OSS, while the French authorities collaborated with the same Japanese until 1945.

¹¹² Alongside US forces were contingents from South Korea, Thailand, Australia and New Zealand.

¹¹³ Richard Nixon (Republican) served two terms as President, 1968-1972 and 1972-1976.

¹¹⁴ Ronald Reagan (Republican) served two terms as President, 1980-1984 and 1984-1988.

following a similar decision by Bolivia to expel the US Ambassador in La Paz. More significantly, Russian bomber planes have flown to Venezuela as a possible retaliation to US military presence in Georgia after Russian intervention in this country during the summer of 2008 (also see above).

Africa

US foreign policy in Africa tended to support the independence of former colonies (mostly British or French), in order to limit Soviet or Chinese influence. An example of this policy can be found during the long and cruel war of independence in Algeria, when the US urged their ally France to reach a diplomatic solution so as not to tarnish the US-backed western alliance in the eyes of newly-independent African countries. Another example is the firm stance adopted by the US when Britain, France and Israel attacked Egypt in 1956 in order to bring Colonel Nasser¹¹⁵ into line: strong diplomatic pressure from both the Soviet Union and the US made Britain and France stop the fighting and re-embark their troops, which was blow to both former colonial powers as well as a signal that they were no longer able to use force and had been relegated by the two superpowers to the background.

But US support of apartheid South Africa did not go down well with African countries in general, and the post-colonial conflicts in Africa were often the result of the Cold War, with western-backed factions fighting their communist-backed rivals...

The Middle-East

This region of the world remains fragile and volatile, with US involvement dating from the post WWI days, when the US supported Ibn Saud and secured oil concessions on Saudi soil. More significantly, US support of Israel from the early days of the Hebrew state has remained to this day a characteristic of US foreign policy, which has not changed with the end of the Cold War. The US is seen as a staunch ally of Israel and its efforts to achieve a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians have not allowed the necessary diplomatic breakthrough, while anti-American hostility has grown in the Arab and Muslim world.

US interests in Middle-East oilfields means that the US has become even more involved in Middle-East diplomacy, especially since both the British and the French withdrew from that region after WWII. When Dr Mossadegh became Iran's Prime Minister in 1951, he nationalised the country's oil fields, only to be deposed by a CIA-backed and sponsored military coup in 1953. Iranian opposition to the Shah's¹¹⁶ regime grew resentful of US intervention and the situation between the two countries has remained extremely tense up to this day. One potentially dangerous incident took place in 1979, after the Revolution which put an end to the Shah's regime, when Iranian students took 65 US Embassy personnel hostage and kept 52 of them for 444 days, forcing the US to negotiate and renounce any involvement in Iranian affairs. The present controversy about Iranian nuclear energy shows that US-Iran relationships are still very much marked by hostility and distrust.

If the US and other nations were given a UN mandate in 1991 during the first Gulf War in order to restore the independence of Kuwait, the present conflict in Iraq is much more controversial and has been damaging even further the image of the US worldwide. The tragedy of 11 September 2001 has brought home in a brutal and tragic way the role of the US on the world stage.

¹¹⁵ Gamal Abdel Nasser was President of the Republic of Egypt from 1956 until his death in 1970.

¹¹⁶ The Shah was the Iranian monarch and ruler until he fled the country on 1979.

To summarise...

America reversed only partially to its isolationist policies after WWI, but could not keep totally away from world affairs, especially in the Pacific and the Far East, with Japanese territorial ambitions on mainland China becoming a threat to American and western interests in the region.

The US remained neutral in the first year of WWII, but already in 1941, President Roosevelt was openly supporting Britain and the US Navy was protecting convoys from attacks by German U-boats. The Japanese attack on the US Pacific fleet at anchor in Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 put an end to American armed neutrality and the US became a combatant nation with the allies.

After 1945, the US emerged as the major western power, while Britain and France were weakened and impoverished and had to face the crumbling of their respective colonial empires. The US, however, had to rely on its allies to face the rising threat of the Soviet Union in Europe, and the founding of NATO and other military alliances involving the US marked the end of American isolation.

America avoided direct conflict in eastern and central Europe, but intervened directly in East Asia, in Korea in the early 1950s, and in Vietnam from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, where US military power suffered a blow. The legacy of the Vietnam War is still visible both in Vietnam and in the US.

In its traditional 'backyard', i.e. in Latin America, the US resumed the 'big stick' policy by covert or open military intervention in Cuba and the Caribbean, as well as in Chile, supporting openly right-wing military dictatorships in the name of freedom and defence against communism.

In Africa, the US tried to support pro-western newly independent countries, but had to mark some distance with the former colonial powers, i.e. Britain and France, especially in Egypt in 1956.

US foreign policy in the Middle East has been marked by unflinching American support for Israel, together with the protection of American oil interests, while relations between the US and Arab and Muslim states (notably Iran) have deteriorated dramatically.

A few films?

Films on US participation in WWII are far too numerous to be listed here. Some were made during the war, often as propaganda, and there has been an uninterrupted stream of WWII films since 1945. We should note that several American films often display certain contempt, if not outright hostility, for the British, by either ignoring British participation in the war, or downplaying it. Here are five examples of such films:

Objective Burma, by Raoul Walsh (1945), shows a US commando raid against a Japanese radar station in the Burmese jungle, suggesting that Burma was eventually liberated by US forces, when in fact the campaign was mostly fought by British & Commonwealth forces¹¹⁷

Patton, by Franklin J. Schaffner (1970); this biopic about US General Patton ridicules the British victor of El Alamein, General Montgomery, showing him engaged in a competition for glory with Patton, which Montgomery loses in Sicily

¹¹⁷ *Objective Burma* was not shown in Britain before 1952.

Saving Private Ryan, by Steven Spielberg (1998), evacuates all British naval participation in the actual tragic and deadly landing on Omaha Beach¹¹⁸

U-571, by Jonathan Mostow (2000); this film tells the story of the capture of a German naval 'Enigma' encoding machine from a German submarine by the US Navy, when in reality, it was captured by the Royal Navy in early 1941, before the US was at war; the film provoked angry reactions from British veterans and was even mentioned during Prime Minister's Question Time at Westminster as an 'affront' to British sailors¹¹⁹

Band of Brothers (2001); this well-documented televised series shows the British as either servants of an anti-aircraft battery on an English airfield while US transport planes take off with US paratroops for the night assault on Normandy, suggesting that the British stay home, or as a unit of paratroops rescued by their US counterparts. Furthermore, the reaction of the men in 'C' Company when they hear that 'Operation Market Garden' is to be placed under British command is marked by hostility.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is the topic of the recent *Pearl Harbor* (2001), by Michael Bay. Despite quite a few inaccuracies, it is interesting to watch the passages when President F.D. Roosevelt asks his cabinet for an increase in American assistance to Britain and the Soviet Union against Germany and Italy, and when he later asks Congress to declare a state of war with the Empire of Japan. Less glamorous but far more interesting and much more accurate is the American-Japanese *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970), by Richard Fleischer, Kinji Fukasaku and Toshio Masuda. The title of this film is in fact the code words ('Tora' is the Japanese for 'tiger') used by the first Japanese wave to signal they had arrived over Pearl Harbor undetected. The build-up to the attack is well-documented, particularly the diplomatic aspects, and the attack itself was remarkably reconstructed.

The Korean War has been pictured on screen, though probably not to the same extent as the Vietnam War. It is the setting for the popular TV series *M*A*S*H* but also for the three following films, all dealing with military topics:

The Bridges at Toko Ri, by Mark Robson (1954); evokes a US air attack against a target in North Korea, with interesting scenes showing US naval personnel on leave in occupied Japan

The Hunters, by Dick Powell (1958); another 'air force' film, with three US pilots having to bail out under enemy lines

Pork Chop Hill, by Lewis Milestone (1959); evokes a costly attack by US soldiers on North Korean positions

American involvement in WWII, the Korean War and the Vietnam War serve as background to *For the Boys*, by Mark Rydell (1991), with the film following the careers of two singers who entertain US troops during these conflicts.

Thirteen Days, by Roger Donaldson (2000), is set during the Cuban missile crisis, when the US and the USSR came very near open (and nuclear) conflict.

¹¹⁸ But the 1962 epic *The Longest Day* paid homage to all combatants in the D-Day landings of 6 June 1944.

¹¹⁹ A commercial Enigma had been known to Polish Intelligence since 1929, and the Poles later passed on their information to their British and French allies.

The Vietnam War has provided a plethora of films, among which we should mention the following:

The Green Berets, by Ray Kellogg and John Wayne (1968); made the same year as the Têt offensive in Vietnam, the film is explicitly pro-US intervention, and was meant as an answer to the growing anti-war movement in the US at the time

The Deer Hunter, by Michael Cimino (1978); set in a working-class community of Russian origin in the US as well as in Vietnam; the scenes with captive US soldiers forced to play Russian roulette for their Vietcong captors can be quite difficult to watch; the film, moreover, shows the contrast between the three young US conscripts, eager to go to war, and the return of two of them, broken in body and soul

Apocalypse Now, by Francis Ford Coppola (1979 – 2001 for the *Redux* version); inspired by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; set during the war, it is a complex, atmospheric film, showing several different aspects of the conflict (brutality against civilians, combat scenes, contrast between professional officers and young US conscripts...)

Rambo: First Blood, by Ted Kotcheff (1982); the first in the series is set in a small US town and evokes the difficult re-adaptation of Vietnam veterans to life back home

Platoon, by Oliver Stone (1986); first of Stone's Vietnam trilogy; a classic war film, following a group of US soldiers in Vietnam

Good Morning Vietnam, by Barry Levinson (1987); the war seen from the perspective of a US Air Force DJ; this film also focuses on the relationship between US soldiers and the Vietnamese

Full Metal Jacket, by Stanley Kubrick (1987); the film follows US Marines, from training in the US to the Battle of Huế in Vietnam, during the Têt offensive of 1968

Born on the First of July, by Oliver Stone (1989); second of Stone's Vietnam trilogy; based on the true story of a Vietnam veteran who becomes an anti-war activist on his return to the US

Heaven and Earth (1993), by Oliver Stone; third of Stone's Vietnam trilogy, based on the memoirs of a Vietnamese civilian and her experience of the war

We Were Soldiers (2002), by Randall Wallace; this patriotic film tells the story of one of the first actions fought in Vietnam by US units ferried by helicopter (the so-called 'Hueys'); it focuses on combat, while showing the North Vietnamese soldiers as brave and tenacious, but also the lives of the US officers' families, anxiously waiting for words from husbands and fathers

Two films from the 1980s are set in Central or South America:

Missing (1982), by Costa-Gavras: inspired by the true story of the disappearance of a young American during the military coup in Chile in 1973, and the attempts at discovering the truth by his girl-friend and his father

Under Fire (1983), by Roger Spottiswoode: three American journalists in Nicaragua in 1979, during the revolution which toppled dictator Somoza.

In *The Godfather: Part II* (1974), by Francis Ford Coppola, the episode set in Havana (Cuba) shortly before the takeover by Fidel Castro (1958) shows the collusion between the corrupt government of Batista and American mobsters as well as American politicians.

Last, but not least, a fine adaptation of a novel by British writer Graham Greene, set during the last days of French Indochina (now Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) and showing the US involvement in the politics of what was to become South Vietnam:

The Quiet American (2002), by Philip Noyce.

Chapter Ten

The political system in the USA: a few notions

The United States of America is a **federal republic** with 50 states, plus the District of Columbia with the federal capital Washington, and islands in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Unlike Britain, the US has an ‘entrenched’ constitution, i.e. one text defining the political organisation of the US as a federal state. But it should be remembered that each state has its own constitution too, hence its own laws, which have to conform to the state constitution as well as with the US constitution.

Remember that the question of the balance between federal power and individual state power was at the heart of the Civil War (1861-1865), with the Southern states (the Confederacy) seceding from the Union with the other states (the North); the pro-slavery South was favouring more powerful individual states, while the anti-slavery North wanted a strong federal government.

Mauk & Oakland and Sirevåg (see sources) note the following elements about the US constitution:

- federalism: supremacy of the US constitution
- separation of powers between the executive, the legislative and the judicial: ‘no person may serve in more than one branch at the same time’ (Mauk & Oakland, p105; remember that in the UK, the Lord Chancellor – Minister of Justice – is a Cabinet Member=executive, a member of the House of Lords=legislative, and a Law Lord=judiciary) – also note that the President, Senators and Representatives are not elected at the same time, which may result in a Republican president with a Democrat Congress (Congress = Senate + House of Representatives = legislative), or even a Democrat Senate and a Republican House
- checks and balances: this means that each power has authority over the other two –
 - the President (executive): appoints federal judges (incl. justices of the Supreme Court), but the Senate (legislative) must confirm these appointments
 - the President can veto laws passed by Congress, but these laws can be passed over the presidential veto by two-thirds majority of both houses (Senate+House of Representatives)
 - the Supreme Court (judicial) can declare presidential acts or Congress acts unconstitutional
 - the Congress can ‘remove members of the other branches from office through impeachment’, when the Senate acts as a court (not so long ago, President Nixon resigned before impeachment procedures began, and more recently President Clinton narrowly escaped impeachment by being acquitted)
 - the House of Representatives may reject a bill passed by the Senate and vice-versa.

The executive (also known as ‘The White House’)

The **President** is the **Head of State** and the **Chief Executive** (there is no Prime Minister in the US, as there is in the UK or in Norway). The president works with his **Cabinet**, comprising the heads of major departments (State Department=foreign affairs,

Treasury=finance, Defence, etc), who are responsible to the president only. The president can be regarded as a combination of head of state + head of government, but whereas the British Prime Minister has to rely on a majority in the House of Commons, the US president can carry on governing even with a majority from the opposite party in Congress. This is why the US cannot be described as a parliamentary system similar to Britain's or Norway's.

The president is Commander-in-Chief of the US armed forces, as well as 'Chief Diplomat'. He¹²⁰ is also 'Party Chief' (like the British Prime Minister who is 'Party Leader'), although as president he is supposed to be above political parties. Finally, he is 'Chief law initiator', as many bills (i.e. drafts for laws, not passed yet) originate in the White House.

The legislative (Congress, also known as 'Capitol Hill')

Because of the political nature of the US (a federation of 50 states), the legislative is divided into two assemblies (Congress):

- the House of Representatives: each state is represented according to its population (total: 435); representatives are elected for 2-year terms (where the whole House is renewed)
- the Senate: each state is represented by 2 senators, irrespective of the size of the state population (total: 100); senators are elected for 6-year terms (where only one third is renewed, the election taking place in the same year as the election for the House of Representatives)

The main business of Congress is law-making (often following a proposal by the president), but it also makes the federal budget: 'no federal funds can be raised, allocated or spent without its direction' (Mauk & Oakland, 2002). Only Congress can declare war (if you have seen *Pearl Harbor*, remember the episode when President Roosevelt asks Congress to declare a state of war between the United States and the Empire of Japan).

Not unlike the British Parliament, Congress works through **committees** in order to examine, discuss and redraft **bills** (same definition as in the UK, see above) before they come for debate and vote. If approved by Congress, a bill becomes an **act** with the signature of the president (not unlike in the UK where a bill passed by Parliament must receive the Royal Assent to become an act).

The judiciary

Each state has its own laws, but federal law is superior to state laws. Consequently, federal courts are superior to state courts. These federal courts are the 93 federal district courts (at least one per state) and some specialised, the US courts of appeal and **the Supreme Court**, whose role, according to the principle of **judicial review**, is to examine legislation (state or federal) in order to check whether it is conform to the US constitution.

Federal judges are appointed by the President, but their appointment has to be confirmed by the Senate.

Political parties

There are two main political parties in the US, the **Democratic Party** (in existence since 1828), and the **Republican Party** (in existence since 1854). It is tempting to think of the Democrats as 'liberals' and Republicans as 'conservatives', but this would be over-simplistic. It seems that Republican voters favour less government intervention and maintenance of order, while Democrat voters favour equality and a slightly more social policy. Differences

¹²⁰ There has not been a woman president yet, nor a coloured person. All presidents of the US so far have always been of the white Anglo-Saxon protestant type (WASP), with the exception of John F. Kennedy, a Roman Catholic of Irish origin.

between both parties, however, cannot be understood in the same terms as those between Labour and Conservative in the UK, and between Social-Democrats and Christian/Liberal-Democrats in Europe in general.

There have been other parties throughout history (Populist, Progressive, Reform, more recently the Green Party with Ralph Nader). These parties can complicate the presidential elections by 'stealing' votes from the two main candidates, but American political life is largely dominated by Republicans (symbol: an elephant) and the Democrats (symbol: a donkey).

A few names:

Republican presidents: Abraham Lincoln (North – during the Civil War), Theodore Roosevelt (the 'big stick' policy), Richard Nixon (oversaw the end of the war in Vietnam, involved in the 'Watergate' scandal, had to resign), George Bush (led an international coalition against Iraq in 1991/92), George W. Bush (son of George Bush, current president at the end of his second mandate)

Democrat presidents: Woodrow Wilson (initiator of the 'League of Nations' in 1920), Franklin Delano Roosevelt (was elected for four consecutive terms – since then the presidential mandate has been reduced to two terms maximum – father of the 'New Deal' policy during the 1930s and the economic crisis after 1929 – US president during WWII), John Fitzgerald Kennedy (President during the Civil Rights campaign, the Cuba missile crisis – assassinated in Dallas, Texas, 1963) – Bill Clinton (most recent Democrat president, was acquitted by the Senate of charges that could have led to his being impeached – see above)

Presidential election

In each party, several candidates announce their intention to run for presidency. 'Primaries' are held in each state in order to narrow the number to two or three (it is a bit like *Idol* on TV2, but of course candidates in the US do not have to sing). Then party conventions name the official candidates (one for president, one for vice-president), who then embark onto the electoral campaign (highlights of which are the televised debates).

The voting process is divided into two:

A – the popular vote (all American citizens, aged minimum 18, registered as voters): all votes are counted throughout the US and a majority normally emerges.

Example: candidate A has 54% of the popular vote, candidate B 45%, candidate C 1%.

But this does not mean that candidate A is elected!

The popular vote is counted *by state* – this means that a candidate may have the majority of votes a greater number of states than his opponent.

Example:

Candidate A has 54% of the popular vote, but has won a majority in only 23 states (possible if these states have a large population, like New-York, Florida, California)

Candidate B has 45% of the popular vote, but has won a majority in 27 states (possible if these states are thinly populated, like Montana, Idaho or Alaska).

Poor candidate C has won no majority at all in any of the 50 states.

B – the electoral college vote: ‘Each state has a number of votes in the college equal to its members in Congress (two Senators plus its numbers of Representatives in the House)’ (Mauk & Oakland). Washington D.C. has three votes, so the total of ‘electors’ is $435 + 100 + 3 = 538$. A state with a very small population has 3 votes guaranteed. Electors usually confirm in their vote the majority in their state.

If our candidate A has won in 23 states with a large population, then he will have received enough electoral votes to be elected. A state like California has a far greater number of electors than a state like Idaho.

But in theory, it is not impossible that a candidate with a majority of states is not elected. In 1960, Republican candidate Richard Nixon won in 26 states, which represented 34.1 million popular votes and 219 electors, while Democrat candidate John F. Kennedy won a majority in fewer states, a popular vote of 34.2 million, but 303 electors (other candidates managed to have 15 electors). Nixon had won many states in the western plains and the Rocky Mountains, with a small population (although he had also won California)...

No summary is provided for this chapter...

A few films...

Young Mr Lincoln, by John Ford (1939); Henry Fonda plays a young Lincoln arriving in Springfield, Illinois, to start working as a lawyer

Mr Smith Goes to Washington, by Frank Capra (1939); James Stewart plays the role of a young and somewhat naive Senator, manipulated by unscrupulous politicians; the film shows the Senate in session, as well as the 'filibustering' tactics, i.e. 'talking out' a bill by extending the debate in order to delay its passing

JFK, by Oliver Stone (1991); a controversial film on the events that preceded and led to Kennedy's assassination in 1963

The West Wing, by Aaron Sorkin (1999-2006); a popular TV series with Martin Sheen, set in a contemporary background in the White House, it gives a glimpse into the mechanics of government in the US

Primary Colors, by Mike Nichols (1998); with John Travolta and Emma Thompson, set during an imaginary but contemporary electoral campaign for the Presidency in the US; not unlike *The West Wing* (see below), it depicts some aspects of political life in the US

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