**Article 1-Physical Geography**

The conterminous United States may be divided into seven broad physiographic divisions: from east to west, the Atlantic–Gulf Coastal Plain; the Appalachian Highlands; the Interior Plains; the Interior Highlands; the Rocky Mountain System; the Intermontane Region; and the Pacific Mountain System. An eighth division, the Laurentian Uplands, a part of the [Canadian Shield](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0810133.html), dips into the United States from Canada in the Great Lakes region. It is an area of little local relief, with an irregular drainage system and many lakes, as well as some of the oldest exposed rocks in the United States.

The terrain of the N United States was formed by the great continental ice sheets that covered N North America during the late Cenozoic Era. The southern edge of the ice sheet is roughly traced by a line of terminal moraines extending west from E Long Island and then along the course of the Ohio and Missouri rivers to the Rocky Mts.; land north of this line is covered by glacial material. Alaska and the mountains of NW United States had extensive mountain glaciers and were heavily eroded. Large glacial lakes (see *Lake Bonneville* under [Bonneville Salt Flats](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0808268.html); [Lahontan, Lake](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0828626.html)) occupied sections of the Basin and Range province; the Great Salt Lake and the other lakes of this region are remnants of the glacial lakes.

**The East and the Gulf Coast**

The Atlantic–Gulf Coastal Plain extends along the east and southeast coasts of the United States from E Long Island to the Rio Grande; Cape Cod and the islands off SE Massachusetts are also part of this region. Although narrow in the north, the Atlantic Coastal Plain widens in the south, merging with the Gulf Coastal Plain in Florida. The Atlantic and Gulf coasts are essentially coastlines of submergence, with numerous estuaries, embayments, islands, sandspits, and barrier beaches backed by lagoons. The northeast coast has many fine natural harbors, such as those of [New York Bay](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0835512.html) and [Chesapeake Bay](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0811720.html), but south of the great capes of the North Carolina coast (Fear, Lookout, and Hatteras) there are few large bays. A principal feature of the lagoon-lined Gulf Coast is the great delta of the [Mississippi](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0833414.html) River.

The Atlantic Coastal Plain rises in the west to the rolling Piedmont (the falls along which were an early source of waterpower), a hilly transitional zone leading to the [Appalachian Mountains](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0804389.html). These ancient mountains, a once towering system now worn low by erosion, extend southwest from SE Canada to the Gulf Coastal Plain in Alabama. In E New England, the Appalachians extend in a few places to the Atlantic Ocean, contributing to a rocky, irregular coastline. The Appalachians and the [Adirondack Mountains](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0802504.html) of New York (which are geologically related to the Canadian Shield) include all the chief highlands of E United States; Mt. [Mitchell](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0833453.html) (6,684 ft/2,037 m high), in the Black Mts. of North Carolina, is the highest point of E North America.

**The Plains and Highlands of the Interior**

Extending more than 1,000 mi (1,610 km) from the Appalachians to the Rocky Mts. and lying between Canada (into which they extend) in the north and the Gulf Coastal Plain in the south are the undulating Interior Plains. Once covered by a great inland sea, the Interior Plains are underlain by sedimentary rock. Almost all of the region is drained by one of the world's greatest river systems—the Mississippi-Missouri. The Interior Plains may be divided into two sections: the fertile central lowlands, the agricultural heartland of the United States; and the [Great Plains](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0821679.html), a treeless plateau that gently rises from the central lowlands to the foothills of the Rocky Mts. The [Black Hills](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0807775.html) of South Dakota form the region's only upland area.

The Interior Highlands are located just W of the Mississippi River between the Interior Plains and the Gulf Coastal Plain. This region consists of the rolling Ozark Plateau (see [Ozarks](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0837207.html)) to the north and the [Ouachita Mountains](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0837091.html), which are similar in structure to the ridge and valley section of the Appalachians, to the east.

**The Western Mountains and Great Basin**

West of the Great Plains are the lofty [Rocky Mountains](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0842189.html). This geologically young and complex system extends into NW United States from Canada and runs S into New Mexico. There are numerous high peaks in the Rockies; the highest is Mt. [Elbert](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0816942.html) (14,433 ft/4,399 m). The Rocky Mts. are divided into four sections—the Northern Rockies, the Middle Rockies, the Wyoming (Great Divide) Basin, and the Southern Rockies. Along the crest of the Rockies is the [Continental Divide](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0813369.html), separating Atlantic-bound drainage from that heading for the Pacific Ocean.

Between the Rocky Mts. and the ranges to the west is the Intermontane Region, an arid expanse of plateaus, basins, and ranges. The [Columbia Plateau](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0812978.html), in the north of the region, was formed by volcanic lava and is drained by the [Columbia](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0812972.html) River and its tributary the [Snake](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0845677.html) River, both of which have cut deep canyons into the plateau. The enormous[Colorado Plateau](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0812943.html), an area of sedimentary rock, is drained by the [Colorado](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0812939.html) River and its tributaries; there the Colorado River has entrenched itself to form the [Grand Canyon](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0821517.html), one of the world's most impressive scenic wonders. West of the plateaus is the Basin and Range province, an area of extensive semidesert.

The lowest point in North America, in [Death Valley](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0814884.html) (282 ft/86 m below sea level), is there. The largest basin in the region is the [Great Basin](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0821650.html), an area of interior drainage (the [Humboldt](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0824513.html) River is the largest stream) and of numerous salt lakes, including the [Great Salt Lake](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0821683.html). Between the Intermontane Region and the Pacific Ocean is the Pacific Mountain System, a series of ranges generally paralleling the coast, formed by faulting and volcanism. The [Cascade Range](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0810684.html), with its numerous volcanic peaks extends S from SW Canada into N California, and from there is continued south by the [Sierra Nevada](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0845172.html), a great fault block. Mt. [Whitney](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0852165.html) (14,495 ft/4,418 m), in the Sierra Nevada, is the highest peak in the conterminous United States.

**The Pacific Coast, Alaska, and Hawaii**

West of the Cascades and the Sierra Nevada and separated from them by a structural trough are the [Coast Ranges](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0812682.html), which extend along the length of the U.S. Pacific coast. The Central Valley in California, the Willamette Valley in Oregon, and the Puget Sound lowlands in Washington are part of the trough. The San Andreas Fault, a fracture in the earth's crust, parallels the trend of the Coast Ranges from San Francisco Bay SE to NW Mexico; earthquakes are common along its entire length. The Pacific Coastal Plain is narrow, and in many cases the mountains plunge directly into the sea. A coastline of emergence, it has few islands, except for the Channel Islands (see [Santa Barbara Islands](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0843539.html)) and those in Puget Sound; there are few good harbors besides [Puget Sound](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0840480.html), [San Francisco Bay](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0843445.html), and San Diego Bay.

Alaska may be divided into four physiographic regions; they are, from north to south, the Arctic Lowlands, the coastal plain of the Arctic Ocean; the Rocky Mountain System, of which the [Brooks Range](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0809103.html) is the northernmost section; the Central Basins and Highlands Region, which is dominated by the [Yukon](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0853192.html) River basin; and the Pacific Mountain System, which parallels Alaska's southern coast and which rises to Mt. [McKinley](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0830983.html) (Denali; 20,320 ft/6,194 m), the highest peak of North America. The islands of SE Alaska and those of the [Aleutian Islands](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0803213.html) chain are partially submerged portions of the Pacific Mountain System and are frequently subjected to volcanic activity and earthquakes. These islands, like those of Hawaii, are the tops of volcanoes that rise from the floor of the Pacific Ocean. [Mauna Kea](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0832271.html) and [Mauna Loa](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0832273.html) on Hawaii are active volcanoes; the other Hawaiian islands are extinct volcanoes.

**Major Rivers and Lakes**

The United States has an extensive inland waterway system, much of which has been improved for navigation and flood control and developed to produce hydroelectricity and irrigation water by such agencies as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the [Tennessee Valley Authority](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/history/A0848169.html). Some of the world's larger dams, man-made lakes, and hydroelectric power plants are on U.S. rivers. The Mississippi-Missouri river system (c.3,890 mi/6,300 km long), is the longest in the United States and the second longest in the world. With its hundreds of tributaries, chief among which are the [Red River](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0841354.html), the [Ohio](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0836447.html), and the [Arkansas](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0804720.html), the Mississippi basin drains more than half of the nation. The Yukon, Columbia, Colorado, and [Rio Grande](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0841960.html) also have huge drainage basins. Other notable river systems include the [Connecticut](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0813251.html), [Hudson](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0824439.html), [Delaware](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0815038.html), [Susquehanna](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0847316.html), [Potomac](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0839908.html), [James](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0825935.html), [Alabama](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0802980.html), [Trinity](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0849428.html), [San Joaquin](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0843473.html), and [Sacramento](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0842898.html).

The Great Salt Lake and Alaska's [Iliamna](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0824969.html) are the largest U.S. lakes outside the [Great Lakes](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0821671.html) and [Lake of the Woods](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0828661.html), which are shared with Canada (Lake Michigan and Iliamna are the largest freshwater lakes entirely within the United States). The [Illinois Waterway](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0824987.html) connects the Great Lakes with the Mississippi River, and the [New York State Canal System](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0909761.html) links them with the Hudson. The [Intracoastal Waterway](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0825378.html) provides sheltered passage for shallow draft vessels along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts  
Read more: [United States: Physical Geography — Infoplease.com](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0861706.html#ixzz24TQIZH91) <http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0861706.html#ixzz24TQIZH91>

**Article 2-People**

More than 79% of the United States population are urban (and more than 50% are estimated to be suburban, a not strictly defined category that can be taken as a subset of urban), and the great majority of the inhabitants are of European descent. According to the U.S. census, as of 2000 the largest minority were Hispanics, who, at 35,305,818 people, accounted for 12.5% of the population; this figure includes people of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and many other origins (who may be any race). The African-American population numbered 34,658,190, or 12.3% of the population, although an additional 0.6% of the population were of African-American descent in part. The Asian population totaled 10,242,998 in 2000, or 3.6%, and consisted predominantly of people of Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, or Japanese origin; an additional 0.6% of the population had a mixed-race background that was partially Asian. The Native American population of the United States, which included natives of Alaska such as [Eskimos](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/society/A0817691.html) and[Aleuts](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/society/A0803212.html), was 2,475,956, or 0.9%, but an additional 0.6% were of partial Native American descent. Roughly a third of Native Americans lived on reservations, trust lands, territories, or other lands under Native American jurisdiction. Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders numbered 398,835 in 2000, or 0.1% of the population; an additional 0.2% were of partial Pacific Island descent. Persons who defined themselves as being of mixed racial background constituted 2.4% of the population in 2000, but the number of people with a mixed racial background, especially in the African-American and Hispanic populations, was in fact much higher. About 82% of the people speak English and about 11% speak Spanish as their first language. There are large numbers of speakers of many other Indo-European and Asian languages, and most languages of the world are spoken somewhere in the United States.

In addition to the original group of British settlers in the colonies of the Atlantic coast, numerous other national groups were introduced by immigration. Large numbers of Africans were transported in chains under abysmal conditions to work as slaves, chiefly on the plantations of the South. When the United States was developing rapidly with the settlement of the West (where some earlier groups of French and Spanish settlers were absorbed), immigrants from Europe poured into the land. An important early group was the Scotch-Irish. Just before the middle of the 19th cent., Irish and German immigrants were predominant. A little later the Scandinavian nations supplied many settlers.

After the Civil War, the immigrants came mainly from the nations of S and E Europe: from Italy, Greece, Russia, the part of Poland then in Russia, and from Austria-Hungary and the Balkans. During this period, there were also large numbers of immigrants from China. During the peak years of immigration between 1890 and 1924 more than 15 million immigrants arrived in the United States. After the immigration law of 1924 (see [immigration](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/society/A0825024.html)), immigration was heavily restricted until the mid-1960s. Since the 1980s, large numbers of new immigrants have arrived. U.S. Census Bureau figures indicate that the proportion of foreign-born people in the U.S. population reached 11.1% in 2000, the highest it had been since the 1930 census; more than 40% of the more than 31 million foreign born had arrived since 1990. More than half of all foreign-born persons in the United States are from Latin America, and more than a quarter are from Asia.

Read more: [United States: People — Infoplease.com](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0861708.html#ixzz24TR2HveE) <http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/us/A0861708.html#ixzz24TR2HveE>

**Article 3-Canada Geography**

**Key Facts**

Canada is the second largest country in the world, smaller only to Russia.

Population: 28 million people

Geographic size: 3.9 million square miles

Capital: Ottawa

Major cities and population: Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Halifax

**Geographic Landmarks**

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| Canada has a very large and diverse range of geographic features. Canada is divided into 10 provinces and 2 territories. Canada stretches from the Pacific Ocean on the west, to the Atlantic Ocean on the east. Northern Canada reaches into the Arctic Circle, while southern Canada stretches below the northern points of the United States.  Canada has a very small population, 28 million people, for its geographic size. Much of Canada is still wilderness, cover by forests. The Rocky Mountains cover a major part of western Canada -- British Columbia, the Yukon Territory, and the western part of Alberta.  West-central Canada is mostly prairie, consisting of large grain farms. |
| The east-central part of Canada are the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. These are major population and industrial areas.  The Maritime provinces on the east coast rely very heavily on the Atlantic Ocean for their way of life. |

**Points of Interest**

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| The majority of Canada is still wilderness. This makes Canada a popular spot for hunting and fishing.  Niagara Falls is one of Canada's best known tourist attractions. It is the largest falls in the world, measured in volume of water. |
| Most of Canada's northern islands are located inside the Arctic Circle.  **Major Industries**  The industry varies as you look across Canada. British Columbia, on the west coast, has historically relied on natural resources such as mining and timber. Manufacturing is now becoming much more important to the economy. Alberta has benefited from considerable natural resources including oil and natural gas. It is also rich in minerals such as zinc, silver, nickel and uranium.  The prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and parts of Alberta produce more than 20% of the world's wheat. Other forms of farming and cattle also contribute to the economy.  Ontario and Quebec are the industrial center of Canada. They have a wide variety of manufactured goods. The lower part of Ontario also has very rich farm land, with many orchards. This Niagara area is also known for its wine production.  The maritime provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland rely heavily on fishing and natural resources such as timber. Prince Edward Island is also well now for its potatoes.  Historical Highlights  Native Americans lived in Canada for thousands of years. In the early 1600s, colonists from Britain and France began to settle in eastern Canada, along the St. Lawrence River. Canada proved to be an excellent spot for trapping and trading of furs. In the 1800s, settlers began to push west. Most of the native Americans were displaced by the Europeans.  **Population and Culture**  Both English and French still play a significant role in Canada, with both being official languages. Most of Quebec and parts of eastern Canada are still heavily influenced by their French origins. Much of the rest of Canada is English origin. Canada has also had significant immigration from other European countries such as Germany, Italy and the Ukraine. There are also many immigrants from Asia. The Canadian Government tries very hard to maintain a multi-cultural environment, encouraging people to maintain their heritage.  Most of Canada's population lives within 100 miles of the border with the United States. About 75% of the population lives in major cities or towns.  **Climate**  With Canada being so large, the climate varies considerably throughout the country. Canada is generally known for its cold winters and hot, but short, summers. |