

“The American Dream” – the USA at a glance

Von Gus Simons, Basel

Seit mindestens 70 Jahren spielen die USA weltweit eine dominierende Rolle – kulturell, ökonomisch, politisch und militärisch. Weil der amerikanische Einfluss auf unterschiedlichen Ebenen beobachtbar ist, glauben viele, die USA schon zu kennen, auch wenn sie sich vielleicht nie mit der Geschichte, der Vielfalt und den Besonderheiten dieses Landes auseinandergesetzt haben.

In dieser Unterrichtseinheit erhalten die Schüler einen Überblick über die Entstehung der Nation, die Schlüsselprobleme der Gesellschaft und des politischen Systems. Außerdem lernen sie soziale Sitten, die man vor der Begegnung mit US-Amerikanern – sowohl im privaten als auch im geschäftlichen Kontext – unbedingt kennen sollte. Dazu erarbeiten sie typische Redemittel und wenden diese in einer Multiple-Choice-Aufgabe an. Die Schüler werden überdies dazu angeregt, Sachverhalte kritisch zu hinterfragen, erworbenes Wissen auf die eigene Lebenswelt zu übertragen und Werturteile zu fällen. Dabei trainieren sie, ihre eigene Meinung in der Fremdsprache wiederzugeben.



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Ihre Schüler lernen die Geschichte, Kultur und Politik der USA näher kennen und trainieren dabei ihre Sprachfähigkeit.

Das Wichtigste auf einen Blick

Kompetenzen

- Grundwissen zur Geschichte, Kultur, Gesellschaft und Politik der USA erwerben
- US-amerikanische Sitten und Verhaltensweisen richtig interpretieren
- die eigene Meinung auf Englisch äußern (schriftlich und mündlich)
- authentischen Fremdsprachentexten zum Thema Geschichte und Gesellschaft der USA grundlegende Informationen entnehmen
- thematischen Wortschatz aneignen und richtig gebrauchen

Dauer

5 Schulstunden (+ Test)

Niveau

B1 mit Möglichkeiten zur Binnendifferenzierung

Ihr Plus

mit zwei Farbseiten und einem Rollenspiel

Fachliche Hinweise

Before colonization

Between 10,000 and 30,000 years ago, people walked over the Bering Strait into present-day Alaska. These people populated the Americas and developed many advanced civilizations over thousands of years. Their descendants are now called **Native Americans**.

A new nation/expansion

Beginning in the late 15th century, **Spanish and Portuguese** explorers began to arrive in the Americas and systematically took control of the land and resources with practically no concern for the well-being of the native peoples. Many millions of Native Americans were killed, either directly by the Europeans or indirectly from the European diseases.

By the mid-eighteenth century, North America was colonized by **Britain, Spain and France**. In the 1770s, intellectuals, inspired by the Enlightenment, declared the British colonies an independent nation: The United States of America. With help from the French, the colonists were victorious in the **Revolutionary War** against the British Army and established a new, democratic nation in which "all men" were equal. Nevertheless, most people did not have equal rights: **Women, black people and Native Americans** had almost no political influence, and most **immigrants** faced **discrimination**. Still, many immigrants came and continued to come from all over the world, hoping to find work, escape oppression, and provide their children a better life. The prospect of achieving this in the USA is known as "**The American Dream**".

Inequality

Perhaps the gravest discrimination in US history was against black people, who were brutally **enslaved** for hundreds of years. The moral question of slavery led to the **American Civil War** between the southern states, which attempted to become an independent nation with a slavery-based economy, and the northern states. After the war ended in 1865 and slavery became illegal, black people still faced racist "**Jim Crow Laws**" in the USA, prohibiting them from using the same public facilities, schools and transport as white people. Nearly 4,000 black people were **lynched** between the 1860s and 1960s. Today black people continue to face discrimination, especially in the legal system.

Political System

The USA was established during the Enlightenment on the principle of democracy. Nevertheless, the presidential elections cause confusion every four years because of the "electoral college" system: Candidates do not win single votes, but rather win states, which each have a certain number of **electoral votes**. Since smaller states have more representation per capita than larger states, sometimes candidates, such as George W. Bush and Donald Trump, win the election with more electoral votes, but less than 50% of the popular votes. Other political offices and decisions are decided, however, by direct vote.

Economy/Relations with Germany

The USA is the world's largest economy, with a GDP greater than all EU countries combined. The USA is Germany's largest export market, and Germany is the USA's fourth largest export market. Many companies have subsidiaries in both countries.

Communicating with US-Americans

Most European visitors to the USA have a similar experience with the locals: they are very easy to talk to and generally very friendly. However, they often pretend to be interested or confirm social plans in order to be polite, even though they have no interest or know that they will not come. They speak with constant hyperbole and **exaggerations**, especially when discussing their skills, knowledge and experiences. In applications for jobs, studies or scholarships, they are very adept at **presenting themselves** as well as possible.

Didaktisch-methodische Hinweise

An welches Niveau richtet sich die Unterrichtseinheit?

Die Einheit richtet sich schwerpunktmäßig an Schülerinnen und Schüler¹ der **Niveaustufe B1**. Allerdings können viele Aufgaben auch von Lernenden mit A2-Niveau verstanden und gelöst werden. Beispielsweise sind im **Rollenspiel (M 5, M 6)** binnendifferenzierte Rollenkarten enthalten. Für leistungsschwächere Schüler steht Ihnen außerdem ein **Hilfekasten zu M 1 (M1_Zusatz_help_box)** auf der **CD 25** bzw. in der **ZIP-Datei** zur Verfügung.



¹ Im weiteren Verlauf wird aus Gründen der besseren Lesbarkeit nur „Schüler“ verwendet.

Welche Berufsgruppen werden berücksichtigt?

Diese Einheit richtet sich an alle, die beruflich in Kontakt mit US-Amerikanern kommen. Da historische, gesellschaftliche und kulturelle Inhalte über die USA abgedeckt werden, kann die Einheit allgemeinbildend in **allen Ausbildungsberufen** eingesetzt werden.

Welche Methoden und Materialien kommen zum Einsatz?

Die Unterrichtseinheit zielt darauf ab, den Schülern **Grundwissen** zur **Geschichte, Kultur** und **Gesellschaft der USA** nahezubringen. Sie erfahren, wie die USA zu einem unabhängigen Land wurden, Afro-Amerikaner die Gleichberechtigung erlangten, der Präsident in den USA gewählt wird und welche Unterschiede es zwischen den USA und Deutschland gibt. Die Lernenden erhalten dabei diverse Möglichkeiten, ihr Wissen anzuwenden und zu festigen: Beispielsweise beschreiben und ergänzen sie eine **USA-Karte (M 1, M 2)**, formulieren **passende Überschriften (M 3, M 4)**, führen ein **Rollenspiel (M 5, M 6)** durch oder füllen eine **timeline (M 7)** aus. Zusätzlich erarbeiten sie **typische Redemittel (M 10, M 11)** für soziale und berufliche Gesprächssituationen in den USA.

Wie wird der Wortschatz erarbeitet?

Der **thematische Wortschatz** wird bei der inhaltlichen Bearbeitung der Aufgaben sowohl schriftlich als auch mündlich trainiert, z.B. in Form von **Textarbeit (M 3, M 4)**, eines **Rollenspiels (M 5, M 6)** oder eines **Lückentexts (M 8)**. Im Material **M 10** und **M 11** werden **typisch US-amerikanische Ausdrucksweisen** erlernt und angewandt.

Wie wird der Lernerfolg überprüft?

Der Lernerfolg wird am Ende der Einheit in einem **Kurztest (M 13)** überprüft. Die Schüler fügen ihr USA-spezifisches Wissen sowie thematischen Wortschatz in einen **Lückentext** ein. Anschließend folgten eine **True-False-Übung** sowie zwei Aufgaben zur **Wissensabfrage** bezüglich **US-amerikanischer Geschichte**.

Minimalplan

Sie haben nur zwei Stunden zur Verfügung? So können Sie die wichtigsten Inhalte erarbeiten:

- | | | |
|------------|--|-----------------|
| 1. Stunde: | How well do you know the USA? – Getting into the topic | M1–M3 |
| 2. Stunde: | Down to business! – American social and professional customs | M10, M11 |

Zusatzmaterialien auf der CD 25 bzw. in der ZIP-Datei:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| M1_Zusatz_help_box | (Hilfekasten zum Ausfüllen der USA-Karte) |
| M3_Zusatz_additional_exercises | (Zusatzübungen) |
| Zusatz_map | (leere USA-Karte zum Ausfüllen) |



Verlaufsübersicht

1. Stunde: How well do you know the USA? – Getting into the topic	
Material	Verlauf
M 1	The United States of America – filling in the map / anhand einer USA-Karte vorhandenes Wissen aktivieren und bekannte Städte, Flüsse und Gebirge ergänzen
M 2	The United States of America – an illustrated map / mithilfe der illustrierten Landkarte typische Merkmale der Bundesstaaten und amerikanische Stereotypen herausarbeiten
M 3	How well do you know the USA? – Getting into the topic / passende Überschriften zu kurzen Beschreibungstexten verfassen und dabei mehr über die Regionen der USA erfahren
<i>Stundenziel:</i>	Die Schüler lernen, dass die USA ein vielfältiges Land mit zahlreichen regionalen und kulturellen Unterschieden sind.

2. Stunde: The history of the USA – origins and expansion	
Material	Verlauf
M 4	Revolutionary! – The origins of the USA / einen Text zur Geschichte der USA erarbeiten, Verständnisfragen beantworten und kritisch reflektieren
<i>Stundenziel:</i>	Die Lernenden verstehen die Entstehung und Entwicklung der USA, denken kritisch über diese nach und verknüpfen das erworbene Wissen mit ihrer eigenen Lebenswelt.

3. Stunde: An American Dream for everyone? – Discrimination in the USA	
Material	Verlauf
M 5	An American Dream for everyone? – Discrimination in the USA / in einem Rollenspiel von der Unterdrückung der Afro-Amerikaner und deren Kampf für Gerechtigkeit erfahren
M 6	An American Dream for everyone? – Role cards / Rollenkarten für das Rollenspiel (M 5)
M 7	African-American civil rights – a timeline / mithilfe des Gruppenpuzzles die historische Entwicklung der Bürgerrechte in den USA nachvollziehen
<i>Stundenziel:</i>	Die Schüler beleuchten die Diskriminierung von Afro-Amerikanern in den USA im historischen sowie im aktuellen Kontext.

4. Stunde: The land of the free – US politics and society	
Material	Verlauf
M 8	US Democracy – how the president is elected in the USA / mithilfe eines Lückentextes das US-amerikanische Wahlsystem kennenlernen und dabei den thematischen Wortschatz erarbeiten
M 9	Land of the free? – Laws in the USA / Gesetze in den USA und Deutschland vergleichen und kritisch reflektieren, ob die USA ihrem Image als „Land der Freiheit“ entsprechen
<i>Stundenziel:</i>	Die Lernenden erhalten einen Einblick in das komplexe Präsidentschaftswahlsystem und kennen grundlegende Unterschiede zwischen der US-amerikanischen und der deutschen Gesetzgebung.

5. Stunde: Down to business! – American social and professional customs	
Material	Verlauf
M 10	Down to business! – Social customs in the USA / anhand eines Interviews typisch amerikanische Verhaltens- und Ausdrucksweisen kennenlernen und in einer Tabelle festhalten
M 11	Americanize the conversation! – What would an American say? / in einer Multiple-Choice-Aufgabe die gelernten sozialen Sitten anwenden
Stundenziel:	Die Schüler verstehen US-amerikanische Sitten, vor allem den Unterschied zwischen dem Gesagten und dem Gemeinten.



Auf der **CD 25** RAAbits Englisch Berufliche Schulen bzw. in der **ZIP-Datei** finden Sie alle Materialien im veränderbaren Word-Format, Zusatzmaterialien und differenzierende Materialien.

Materialübersicht

1. Stunde How well do you know the USA? – Getting into the topic

- M 1 (Ws) The United States of America – filling in the map
 M 2 (Tr) The United States of America – an illustrated map
 M 3 (Tx) How well do you know the USA? – Getting into the topic

2. Stunde The history of the USA – origins and expansion

- M 4 (Tx) Revolutionary! – The origins of the USA

3. Stunde An American Dream for everyone? – Discrimination in the USA

- M 5 (Rp) An American Dream for everyone? – Discrimination in the USA
 M 6 (Ca) An American Dream for everyone? – Role cards
 M 7 (Ws) African-American civil rights – a timeline

4. Stunde The land of the free – US politics and society

- M 8 (Ws) US Democracy – how the president is elected in the USA
 M 9 (Ws) Land of the free? – Laws in the USA

5. Stunde Down to business! – American social and professional customs

- M 10 (Tx) Down to business! – Social customs in the USA
 M 11 (Ws) Americanize the conversation! – What would an American say?

Vocabulary “The American Dream” (M 12)

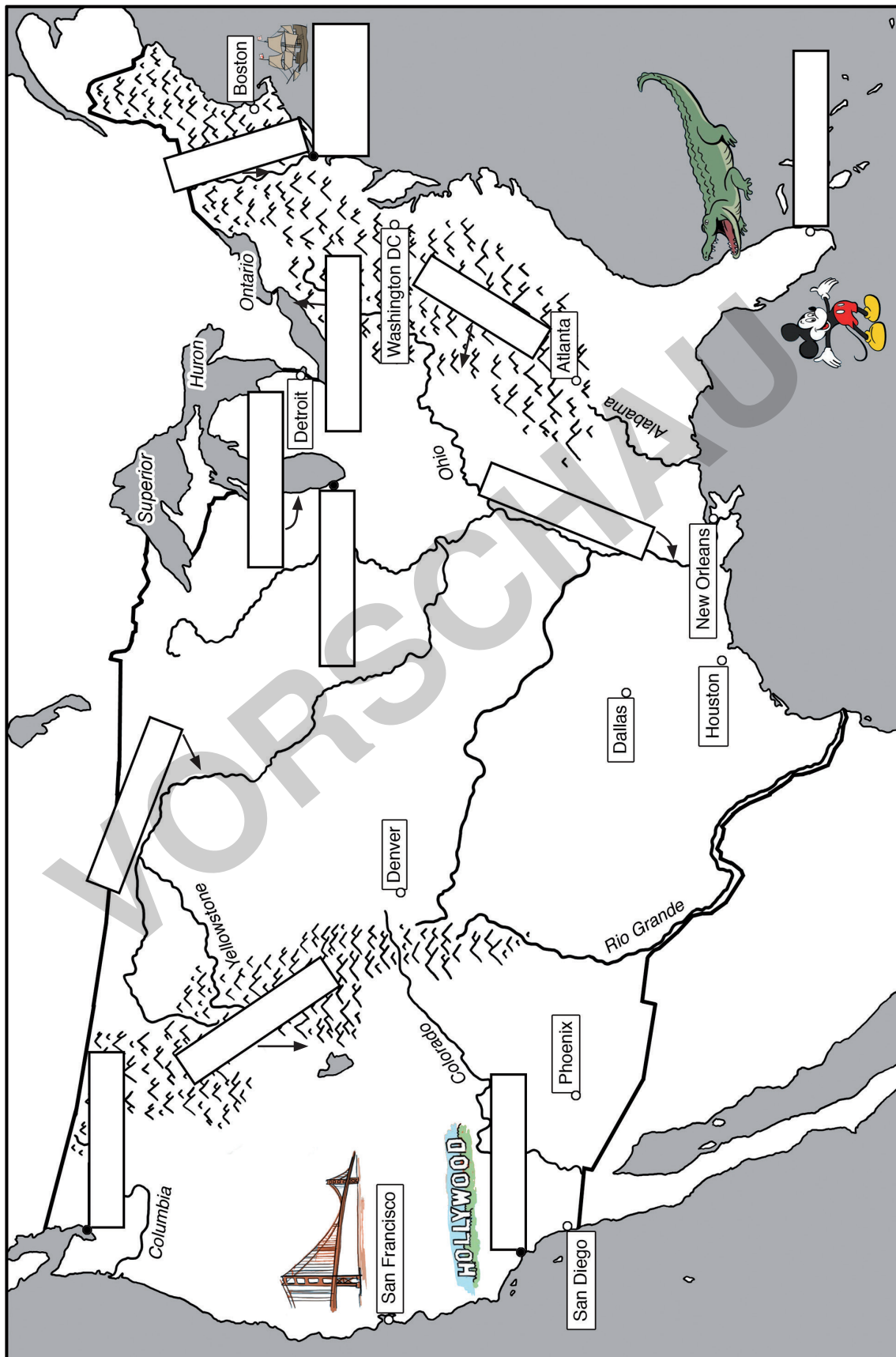
Test “The American Dream” – class test (M 13)

Bedeutung der Abkürzungen

Ca: Cards; **Rp:** Role play; **Tr:** Transparency; **Tx:** Text; **Ws:** Worksheet

M 1 The United States of America – filling in the map

Have a look at the map and fill in the boxes with the missing information (five cities, three rivers, two mountains, two lakes).



M3 How well do you know the USA? – Getting into the topic

Compare your knowledge of the USA to your classmates'. Then learn more about it!

1. _____

This city was French, but Napoleon sold it to the USA in 1803. It has Caribbean influence¹ because of its location on the Gulf of Mexico. Jazz music began here. Many people still speak a French dialect.

2. _____

This Californian city is famous for its film industry. Many famous actors, actresses and musicians live here. It is very warm, so you can go swimming in the Pacific Ocean.

3. _____

This northern Californian city was the center of the hippie movement² in the 1960s. Since the 19th century there has been a large Chinese community, and in many neighborhoods Cantonese³ is the main language. In recent years, the region has become a center for new tech industries.

4. _____

This group of islands in the Pacific Ocean was an independent nation until the USA took control of it in 1893. People from here often speak a language called Pidgin, which is a mixture of English and various Pacific languages. The ukulele is from here.

5. _____

This state is a large peninsula⁴ in the southeast United States. It is very warm and is called the "Sunshine State". In its second largest city, Miami, there is a large Cuban population, so most people can speak Spanish. It became a state of the USA in 1845 after the USA forced out⁵ the Seminole Native Americans⁶.

6. _____

This state on the east coast was one of the original 13 British colonies. Here you can find some communities of Amish people. The Amish are descendants⁷ of Swiss and Germans who immigrated in the 18th century. Thus, they still speak an old dialect of German. They don't use cars, electricity or modern technology.

7. _____

This northern state is home to many groups of Native Americans. Many of them can speak variations of the Sioux language. Here you can find Mount Rushmore. It is a monument of the faces of four US Presidents carved⁸ into a mountain. The problem is that the region is sacred⁹ for Native Americans, so it was a big insult to carve the presidents' faces there.

8. _____

This is the largest US state, but it is not connected to the other states. It is on the northwestern corner of Canada. In 1867, the USA bought the land from Russia. It is very cold here, but some Native American groups have lived here for thousands of years. They speak many different languages in the Eskimo and Na-Dene language families.



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Vocabulary

1 **influence**: der Einfluss – 2 **movement**: die Bewegung – 3 **Cantonese**: Kantonesisch – 4 **peninsula**: die Halbinsel – 5 **to force out**: verdrängen – 6 **Native American**: der/die Ureinwohner/in Amerikas – 7 **descendant**: der Nachfahre/die Nachfaherin – 8 **to carve**: meißeln – 9 **sacred**: heilig

Tasks

- What is "typical US-American" for you? Think of food, music, language, economy, free time, etc. Take five minutes in order to write down as many things as you can. Afterwards, compare your results to your classmates'.
- Eight places are described in the box above, but the names have gone missing. Read the descriptions and write the names of the places on the lines. A look at the map (M 2) might help you.

An American Dream for everyone? – Role cards

M 6

Card 1

Elizabeth Freeman (1744–1829) was born as a slave around 1744 in New York (then still a British colony). At that time, Europeans traded¹ Africans and their descendants as slaves. In 1780, Freeman heard someone read the constitution² of Massachusetts, which begins “All men are born free and equal ...”. She asked a lawyer³ to help her become free. They won in court⁴, and so she became the first slave freed in Massachusetts. Because of the court’s decision, slavery became illegal in Massachusetts.

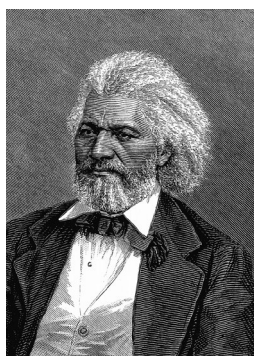
Importing slaves into the USA became illegal in 1808. Slavery (but not importation) was legal in the southern states until 1865. Freeman died in 1829, so she never saw the end of slavery.



© Mum Bett, aka Elizabeth Freeman (ca. 1812) by Susan Ridley Sedgwick

1 to trade: handeln – 2 constitution: die Verfassung – 3 lawyer: der/die Rechtsanwalt/Rechtsanwältin – 4 court: das Gericht

Card 2



Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) was born as a slave in 1818. When he was 20 years old, he escaped¹ from Maryland, a slave state, to New York, a free state, with help from his future wife Anna Murray. Douglass became a famous speaker against slavery. He also advocated for women’s rights. Slavery was abolished in the American Civil War² from 1861–1865. During this war, Douglass helped the anti-slavery Union Army by recruiting³ soldiers. After slavery became illegal, black people still did not have equal rights. In many regions they could not vote, and many public places were segregated⁴.

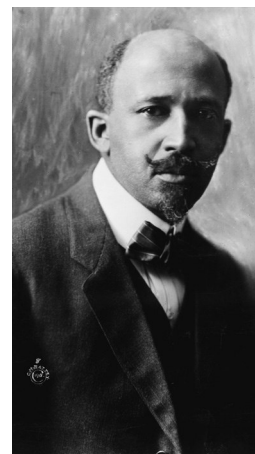
Until his death in 1895, he worked with the government of the USA in order to improve the situation of black people.

1 to escape: fliehen – 2 American Civil War: der amerikanische Bürgerkrieg – 3 to recruit: rekrutieren – 4 segregated: hier: getrennt nach Rassen

Card 3

W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963) was born three years after slavery became illegal. He studied at Humboldt University in Berlin and at Harvard University. In 1895, he was the first black American to earn a doctorate. Although slavery became illegal in 1865, there were still many problems for black people. In the southern states, the so-called “Jim Crow Laws” kept black people separate from white people in schools, buses, trains, restaurants, bathrooms, and other public places. If white people believed that a black person committed a crime², they would often murder him instead of contacting police. This is called “lynching³”. To resist⁴ this discrimination, Du Bois co-founded an organization called NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in 1909.

The NAACP is still an important civil rights institution today. Du Bois also supported rights for native people in European colonies in Africa and in Asia. He believed that racism was based in capitalism.



© Photo: C. M. Battey

1 law: das Gesetz – 2 to commit a crime: ein Verbrechen begehen – 3 lynching: die außergesetzliche Hinrichtung – 4 to resist sth: sich gegen etw. wehren

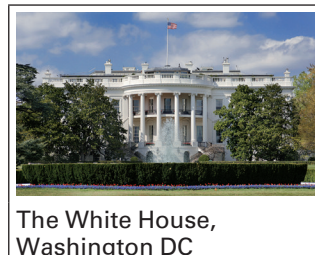
US Democracy – how the president is elected in the USA

M 8

How did some presidents win the elections with less than 50 percent of the vote? Read the text and find out.

Presidential elections

When you think of voting¹, you expect the person with over 50 (a) _____ of the votes to win. In the USA, this is not always the case. When George W. Bush became president in 2001, and Donald Trump in 2017, both had won less popular votes than their opponents²! This also happened in 1824 (President John Quincy Adams), 1876 (President Rutherford Hayes) and 1888 (President Benjamin Harrison).



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The founders³ of the USA thought that (b) _____ people were not educated⁴ enough to directly vote for the president. Therefore, each state has (c) _____: people who decide which candidate their state supports⁵. The electors normally give all their state's support to the candidate who has the most votes in their state. This is called the "winner take all" system.

Take North Carolina as an example: it is a (d) _____ with around ten million people and 15 electors. If 5,000,001 people vote for Candidate A and 4,999,999 people vote for Candidate B, all 15 (e) _____ will go to Candidate A!

The number of electors a state has depends on its population size, but each state has at least three. This is why people in states with a smaller population⁶ have more representation than in bigger states. California is a big state with 37 million people and 55 electors. Wyoming has around half a million people and three electors. So in California around 650,000 people get one electoral vote, while in Wyoming 160,000 people get one. This means that each person in Wyoming has around four times more (f) _____ in a presidential election than each Californian.

Some people think that this system is not (g) _____. But would a direct vote be better? If every vote was (h) _____, then the states with the (i) _____ populations would always decide the elections. The rural⁷ states with smaller populations would not have their interests represented, so it would not be fair, either. This might sound technical, but it is a big (j) _____ in the USA!

Congressional elections



Congress building,
Washington DC

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The president is very (k) _____ and can make laws, but most laws are made in Congress. There are two groups in Congress: the (l) _____ and the (m) _____. Every state, large or small, has two senators, so in the Senate, all states have equal representation. But smaller states have less congress people in the House of Representatives. This means, the representation is proportional⁸ to the population.

Vocabulary

1 to vote: wählen – 2 opponent: der/die Gegner/in – 3 founder: der/die Gründer/in – 4 educated: gebildet –
5 to support: unterstützen – 6 population: die Bevölkerung – 7 rural: ländlich – 8 proportional: verhältnismäßig –
9 electors: der Wahlmann – 10 electoral vote: die Wahlmännerstimme

regular • Senate • representation • fair • equal • electors⁹ • state • powerful • percent •
House of Representatives • electoral votes¹⁰ • discussion • biggest

Tasks

- Find out about the voting system in the USA by filling in the gaps in this text.
- Discuss the following questions in your exercise book:
 - Is the voting system in the USA fair in your opinion? Why/Why not?
 - Why are politics in the USA relevant for people in your country? Think of examples.

M 10 Down to business! – Social customs in the USA

There are US-American social customs¹ which you should know when working in the USA.

The United States and Germany have a very active relationship politically, culturally and economically. The USA is Germany's largest export market! Germany exports machinery, electronics, cars, chemicals and many other products and materials to the USA. Germany is a large export market for the USA as well and many companies have subsidiaries² in both countries. The good news is that US-Americans are generally open and easy to chat with. The bad news is that they usually only speak English and they will expect you to speak English with them.

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Interviewer: Hello Nils, thanks for doing an interview with us.

Nils: Thanks for inviting me!

Interviewer: How are you enjoying your internship in San Francisco?

Nils: I'm really enjoying it a lot, but there were many aspects of American life which I had to get used to.

Interviewer: Could you please give us some examples?

Nils: Well, I expected to be called "Mr. Müller" at work, but here everyone uses first names. Even when talking to your boss! Actually, they don't just use first names, but mostly nicknames. If your name is Joseph, you are Joe or Joey. Another German intern here is named Anna-Katharina, but everyone just calls her "Kat". Nobody knew the name "Nils", so everyone calls me "Niel", since that is a common name here.

Interviewer: Haha, ok then, Niel! Have you made many friends here?

Nils: Yes, it is very easy to meet people! Every day my colleagues ask how I'm doing. Actually, US-Americans always ask how you're doing, but it's just a way to say hello. They don't really want to know all of your problems. You should just say "Fine, thanks" or "I'm well. And you?"

Interviewer: So do you feel like the social interactions are superficial³?

Nils: Sometimes. People act friendly and pretend to be interested in order to be polite, even if they don't like you or don't care what you are saying. If you invite an American to an event, they pretend to be interested and say they will come, even if they will not come!

Interviewer: That sounds complicated. What other strange customs are there?

Nils: Well, everything here is exaggerated⁴. If they like a restaurant, they don't just say "I like it". They have to say something like "Oh my gosh, it's the best food in the city!" or "It's incredible! Just amazing!" If you tell someone that her new haircut is "nice" it can be a real insult. You have to tell her something like "It really fits your style! You look like that one actress ..."

Interviewer: Do you have any advice for understanding Americans better?

Nils: Yes, it's good to know a little bit about American sports, since all their metaphors are about sports. If you "drop the ball⁵" it means you made a big mistake. If someone asks you for a "ballpark figure⁶" they want an estimate. If you "play hardball⁷" then you are a tough negotiator⁸.

Interviewer: Haha! OK ... How is it to work here?

Nils: Well, there is no English word for "Feierabend". People work longer hours, have less vacation days and often bring work home.

Interviewer: That sounds tough. Are you learning a lot professionally?