

## THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

The United States has the third-largest population in the world (after China and India). In 1990, the population in the United States passed the 250,000,000 mark. Who are the American people ?

The most distinctive characteristic of the United States is its people. As nineteenth-century poet Walt Whitman said, the United States “is not merely a nation but a nation of nations.” People from around the world have come to the United States and influenced its history and culture.

### *The Native Americans*

The first people on the American continent came from Asia. They came across the Bering Strait from Siberia to Alaska at various times when the sea level dropped. The first migration might have been as early as 40,000 years ago. Once in America, these people migrated east across North America and south through Central and South America. When Columbus arrived in the fifteenth century, there were perhaps 10 million people in North America alone. They had developed many different kinds of societies. There were people that Columbus called “Indians”, in the mistaken belief that he had reached the East Indies.

The story of the westward growth of the United States was also the story of the destruction of the Native Americans, or Indians. Today there are about 1,5 million Indians in the United States. Western states-especially California, Oklahoma, Arizona and New Mexico-have the largest Indian populations. About one-third of the Native Americans live on reservations, land that was set aside for them. Most of the others live in cities. Poverty and unemployment are major problems, especially on the reservations.

### *The British*

Beginning in the 1600s, the British settled the eastern part of North America. By the time of the American Revolution (1776), the culture of the American colonists (their religion, language, government, etc.) was thoroughly British-with an American “twist.” In a sense, then, the British culture was the foundation on which America was built. Also, over the years, many immigrants to the United States have come from the United Kingdom and Ireland.

### *African-Americans*

From 1620 to 1820 by far the largest group of people to come to the United States came, not as willing immigrants, but against their will. These people were West Africans brought to work as slaves, especially on the plantations, or large farms, of the South. In all, about 8 million people were brought from Africa.

The Civil War, in the 1860s, ended slavery and established equal rights for black Americans. But many states, especially in the South, passed laws segregating (separating) and discriminating against black Americans. The Civil rights movement, in the 1950s and 1960s, helped get rid of these laws.

However, the effects of 200 years of slavery, 100 years of segregation, and continued prejudice are not as easy to get rid of. Despite many changes, black Americans are still much more likely than white Americans to be poor and to suffer the bad effects that poverty brings. Today about 12 percent of America's population is black. Many black Americans live in the South and in the cities of the Northeast and Midwest.

### ***Immigrants from Northern and Western Europe***

Beginning in the 1820s, the number of immigrants coming to the United States began to increase rapidly. Faced with problems in Europe-poverty, war, discrimination-immigrants hoped for, and often found, better opportunities in the United States. For the first half-century, most immigrants were from northwestern Europe-from Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Sweden, and Norway. In the late 1840s, for example, widespread hunger resulting from the failure of the potato crop led many Irish people to emigrate United States.

During these years, the United States was expanding into what is now the Midwest. There was a lot of land available for farming. Many new immigrants became farmers in the Midwest. To this day, German and Scandinavian influence is obvious in Midwestern foods and festivals.

### ***Immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe***

Although immigration from northwestern Europe continued, from the 1870s to the 1930s even more people came from the countries of southern and eastern Europe-for example, Italy, Greece, Poland, and Russia. Like the earlier immigrants, they came to escape poverty and discrimination. From 1900 to 1910 alone, almost 9 million people arrived from these and other countries.

During this period, the United States was changing from a mainly agricultural to a mainly industrial country. The new immigrants helped make this change possible. Many settled in cities and worked in factories, often under conditions that were quite bad.

In the 1920s discrimination and prejudice in the United States led to laws limiting immigration. Immigration showed down until the 1960s when these laws were changed.

### ***Hispanic-Americans***

Hispanics are people of Spanish or Spanish-American origin. Some Hispanics lived in areas that later became part of the United States (for example, in what are now the states of California and New Mexico). Many others immigrated to the United States. Hispanic immigration has increased greatly in recent decades.

Hispanics come from many different countries. Three especially large groups are Mexican-Americans (who make up about two-thirds of the total Hispanic population), Puerto Ricans, and Cuban-Americans. (Puerto Rico was a U.S. territory and since 1952 has been a self-governing, Commonwealth.) While the groups have much in common (especially the Spanish language), there are also many differences. The groups are also concentrated in different areas-Mexican-Americans in Texas and California, Puerto Ricans in New York, and Cuban-Americans in Florida. Many recent immigrants are from Central American countries.

Hispanics are one of the largest growing groups in the United States population. Within 25 years, they will be the largest minority group.

### ***Asian-Americans***

In the nineteenth century, laws limited Asian immigration. Also, Asians in the United States, such as the Chinese and Japanese who had come to California, met with widespread discrimination.

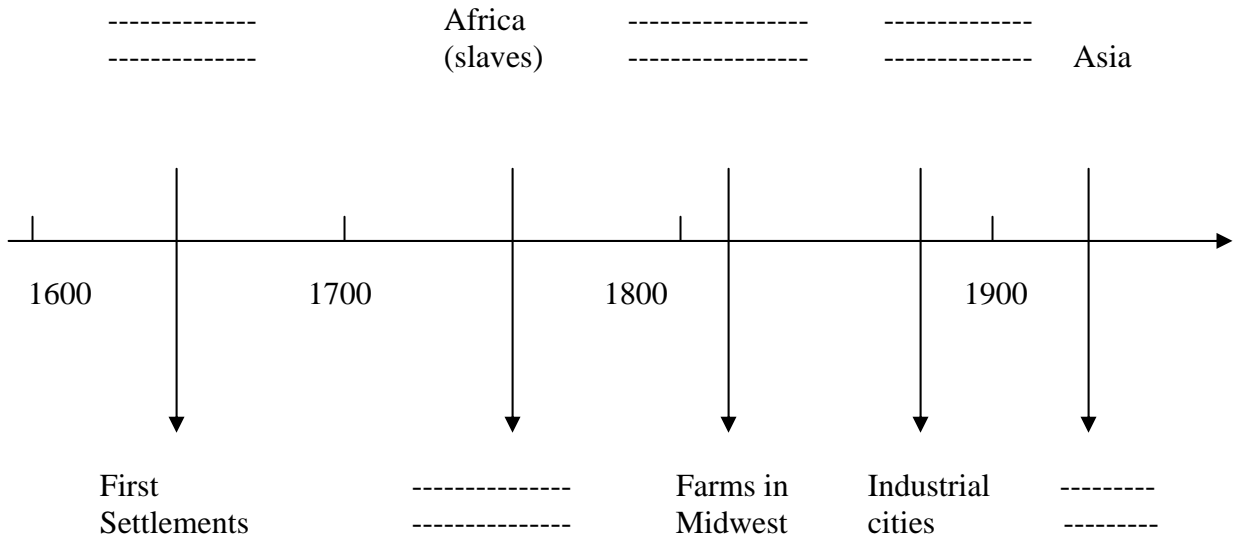
Since the mid-1960s, with changes in immigration laws and with conflicts in Southeast Asia, Asians have been a major immigrant group. In the 1980s, for example, almost half of all immigrants were Asian. Countries that Asian-Americans have come from include China and Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and India. Many have settled in California, Hawaii, New York, and Texas.

### ***Melting Pots and Mosaics***

For years, it was thought that the United States was and should be a “melting pot”-in other words, that people from all over the world would come and adopt the American culture as their own. More recently, some people have compared the United States to a mosaic-a picture made of many different pieces. America’s strength, they argue, lies in its diversity and in the contributions made by people of many different cultures. America needs to preserve and encourage this diversity, while making sure that everyone has equal opportunity to succeed.

(from *Spotlight on the USA*, Randee Falk)

*Complete the chart with the information from the text above.*



***Discussion point***

What do 'melting pot' and 'mosaic' refer to?

What do you think are some of the advantages and disadvantages of each?

## POPULATION GROWTH: THE GREAT IMMIGRATION

In 1850 the population of United States was about 23,000,000. In 1930 it was 123,000,000. What was the average increase per year for that 80-year period?

Much of the great increase in population was due to a great immigration from abroad, mostly from Europe. Today, many people in the United States have ancestors who came during that time.

- *The chart below shows some of the years in the period of great immigration, the number of immigrants who arrived in those years, and an example of the number who arrived from the specific countries. Listen to the information on the cassette and fill in the years, numbers, and countries in the chart.*

Year	Total number of immigrants that year	Country	Number of immigrants
1851			221,000
	428,000		215,000
1870		Great Britain	
1873			20,000
	789,000	Scandinavia	
	1,285,000	The former Soviet Union	
1914			284,000
1921	805,000		

## ELLIS ISLAND, IMMIGRATION STATION

When many immigrants arrived in the United States from Europe by ship, most of them passed through an immigration station on Ellis Island in New York.

- **CLOZE**

*Read the following information about Ellis Island. Try to fill in the blanks with the correct word. After you have filled in as much as you can, listen to the cassette to fill all the blanks.*

Ellis Island is .....1..... mile south of Manhattan Island in New York City, near the Statue of Liberty. It was an immigration station from .....2..... to .....3..... . In that time, .....4..... immigrants passed through Ellis Island. That was .....5..... % of all immigrants who entered the United States in that period.

The immigrants arrived from .....6..... by ship. On Ellis Island they received .....7..... examination and interviews about where they planned to

.....8.....and .....9..... . Then they bought train tickets there and continued on the new homes.

Ellis Island was closed for many years. In .....10..... , it became part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument . It was renovated between .....11..... and .....12..... , and it was opened as an immigration museum in 1990.

## LANGUAGES IN THE UNITED STATES

The United States is (as of 2004) the home of approximately 336 languages (spoken or signed) of which 176 are indigenous to the area.

### **Official language status**

The United States does not have an official language; nevertheless, American English (referred to in the US as simply English) is the language used for legislation, regulations, executive orders, treaties, federal court rulings, and all other official pronouncements. Many individual states have adopted English as their official language, and several states and territories are officially bilingual:

- Louisiana (English and French),
- New Mexico (English and Spanish),
- Hawaii (Hawaiian English and Hawaiian),
- Puerto Rico (Spanish and English),
- Guam (Chamorro and English),
- American Samoa (Samoan and English);

and one is officially trilingual:

- Northern Mariana Islands (English, Chamorro, and Carolinian).

Until the 1950s, Pennsylvania was officially bilingual in English and German.

Native American languages are official or co-official on many of the US Indian reservations and Pueblos.

In 2000, the census bureau printed the standard census questionnaires in six languages: English, Spanish, Korean, Mandarin (in traditional Chinese characters), Vietnamese, and Tagalog. The English-Only movement seeks to establish English as the only official language of the entire nation.

### **Immigrant languages**

The U.S. has long been the destination of many immigrants. From the mid 19th century on, the nation had large numbers of residents who spoke little or no English, and throughout the country state laws, constitutions, and legislative proceedings appeared in the languages of politically important immigrant groups. There have been bilingual schools and local newspapers in such languages as German, Irish, Italian, Norwegian, Greek, Polish, Swedish, Czech, Japanese, Yiddish, Welsh, Cantonese, etc. Currently, Asian languages account for the majority of languages spoken in immigrant communities: Korean, various Chinese languages, Hindi, Telugu, Vietnamese, and Tagalog.

(from **Wikipedia - The Free Encyclopedia**)

## **American English**

There are about twice as many speakers of American English as of other varieties of English, and four times as many as speaker of British English. The leading position of the US in world affairs is partly responsible for this. Americanisms have also been spread through advertising, tourism, telecommunications and the cinema.

As a result, forms of English used in Britain, Australia, etc. have become less distinct. But there remain many differences in idiom and vocabulary, especially in British and American English. For most people, however, the most distinctive feature of American English is its accent.

## **The development of American English**

British people who went to the US in the 17<sup>th</sup> century spoke a variety of dialects. After they reached the US their language developed independently of British English. New words were added for food, plants, animal, etc. not found in Britain. Many were taken from the Indian languages of Native Americans. The languages of Dutch and French settlers, and of the huge numbers of immigrants entering the US in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, also contributed to the development of American English. Inventions such as electric lighting, the typewriter, telephone and television added large numbers of words to the language and these, with the inventions, soon spread to Britain.

## **Regional differences**

General American English (GAE) is the dialect that is closest to being a standard. It is especially common in the Midwest but it is used in many parts of the US. The associated Midwestern accent is spoken across most of the northern states, and by many people elsewhere.

The main dialect groups are the Northern, the Coastal Southern, the Midland, from which GAE is derived, and the Western. The main differences between them are in accent, but some words are restricted to particular dialects because the item they refer to is not found elsewhere: *grits*, for example, is eaten mainly in the south and is considered to be a Southern word.

Northern dialect spread west from New York and Boston. New England has its own accent. The old, rich families of Boston speak with a distinctive Bostonian accent which is similar to Britain's RP.

Midland dialects developed after settlers moved west from Philadelphia. Both midland and western dialects contain features from the Northern and Southern groups. There are increasing differences within the Western group, as South-western dialects have been influenced by Mexican Spanish.

The Southern dialects are most distinctive. They contain old words no longer used in other American dialects, e.g. *kinfolk* for 'relative' and *hand* for 'farm worker'. French, Spanish and native-American languages also contributed to Southern dialects. Since

black slaves were taken mainly to the South and most African Americans still live there, Black English and Southern dialects have much in common. The accent is a Southern drawl which even foreigners recognize. American 'r' at the end of a word is often omitted, so that *door* is pronounced /dou/, and diphthongs are replaced with simple vowels, so that *hide* is pronounced /ha:d/. some people use *y'all* as a plural form of 'you'. This is more common in speech than in writing.

Southern dialects and accents are often thought by other Americans to be inferior. Black English and Cajun English may also be less acceptable. Both varieties are restricted to particular ethnic or social general feelings about those groups.

### ***American official language?***

For a long time English helped to unite immigrants who had come from many countries. Now, Hispanic immigrants, especially in south-western states, want to continue to use their own language, and many Americans are afraid that this will divide the country. The Hispanic population is growing and will reach 80 million by 2050.

This situation led to the founding of the English Only Movement, which wants to make English the official language of the US. Supporters believe that this will help keep states and people together, and that money spent on printing forms, etc. in both English and Spanish would be better spent on teaching the immigrants English. Others think that American official language is unnecessary. They argue that children of immigrants, and *their* children, will want to speak English anyway, and that a common language does not always lead to social harmony.

(from *Oxford Guide to American and British Culture*)

- ***Answer these questions.***

1. What is the major language in the USA?
2. In what ways did American English develop independently of British English?
3. What is Bostonian accent like?
4. Who are Hispanic immigrants?
5. What is the English Only Movement?

Do people in the USA support the movement?

## **AMERICAN ENGLISH AND BRITISH ENGLISH**

Written English is more or less the same in both Britain and the USA, and in everyday speech the two peoples have little difficulty in understanding one another. In fact, the Americans have exported a large number of their words and phrases to Britain - through literature, the movies, TV, American soldiers during both world wars, and tourists. The following words and phrases, among countless others, are of American origin: *teenager*, *boyfriend*, *radio*, *commuter*, (football) *fan*, *aisle* (way down the middle of a church, train or theater), *hold-up* (robbery), *right away* (at once), *slip up* (make a



mistake), *beat up* (give some one a beating), *let's face it* (let's admit), *be in the red* (in debt to your bank), *way of life*.

Some of the words that Americans now use come from the languages of their immigrants, particularly from the Germans, who make up a large proportion of the country's population. The basic meaning of "dumb" in both British and American English, is "*unable to speak*." In the USA it acquired a second meaning, "*stupid*," straight from the German "*dumm*" (stupid), and this second meaning has now crossed the Atlantic to Britain. As the German immigrants learned English, they sometimes translated literally from their own language. For example, "*ausfullen*" became "*to fill out*" (a form, etc.), and the Americans have adopted "*fill out*" instead of the British English "*fill in*," though some Britons now use "*fill out*."

Of course, there are some American words that are peculiar to the USA and are quite different from their equivalents in the rest of the English-speaking world. Here is a list of some of the most important.

**Am. English**

elevator  
faucet  
bathtub  
drapes  
apartment  
apartment house  
antenna (*radio*)  
sidewalk  
pavement  
truck  
garbage, trash  
garbage can  
check (restaurant, store etc.)  
to line up  
candy  
Inc. (*Incorporated*)  
rent a car  
living room  
  
presently  
Hudson, Ohio River etc.  
in the fall  
cookie  
President (*in business*)

**Brit. English**

lift  
tap  
bath  
curtains  
flat  
block of flats  
aerial  
pavement  
roadway (*surface*)  
lorry (*also* truck)  
rubbish  
dustbin  
bill  
to queue  
sweets  
Co. (*Company*)  
hire a car  
lounge *or*  
sitting room *or*  
front room *or*  
drawing room  
*or* living room  
at the moment  
River Thames, Tyne etc.  
in autumn  
sweet biscuit  
Managing Director

subway  
first floor

underground railway  
ground floor

To those who speak, or learn American English, “*to wash up*” means to wash one’s hands, but in British English it means to wash the dishes.

The words for the *toilet* can also cause confusion, although the word *toilet* itself is common to both languages.

**Am. English**

comfort station  
restroom  
bathroom  
little boy’s room  
little girl’s room  
the john

**Brit. English**

public convenience  
ladies/gents  
lavatory  
w.c.  
loo  
lav

There are complications, too, with the time, the date and with numbers.

**Am. English**

What time do you have?  
What time is it?  
a quarter *after* four (4:15)  
a quarter *of* five (4:45)  
Monday through Friday  
July fourth, or fourth  
of July (*in speech*)

**Brit. English**

What’s the time? What time do you make it?  
a quarter *past* four (4:15)  
a quarter *to* five (4:45)  
(from) Monday to Friday  
July the fourth

April 12, 1981 would appear in a hotel register, on a birth certificate, at the top of a letter, etc, as:

4/12/81 (month first) in USA

12/4/81 (day first) in UK

Also,

**Am. English**

one hundred one (*in speech*)  
one billion  
1,000,000,000 ( $10^9$ )

**Brit. English**

one hundred *and* one  
one billion  
1,000,000,000,000 ( $10^{12}$ )

Americans and British use different greetings. In the USA the commonest greeting is “Hi!”. In Britain it is “Hallo!” or “How are you?” “Hi!” is creeping into British English too. When they are introduced to someone, the Americans say, “*Glad to know you.*” The British say, “*How do you do?*” or “*Pleased to meet you.*” When Americans say “*goodbye,*” they nearly always add, “*Have a good day,*” or “*Have a good trip,*” etc. to friends and strangers alike. Britons are already beginning to use “Have a good day.”

The British constantly use “got” in the sense of “have”. The Americans hardly ever do.

**Am. English:** *Do you have a car, room, etc.? Yes, I do.*

**Brit. English:** *Have you got a car, room, etc.? Yes, I have.*

*Pronunciation* can often cause misunderstandings:

**Am. English**

apricot (*a* as in tap)

progress (*o* as in fog)

simultaneous (*i* as in ice)

semi (*i* as in ice)

leisure (*ei* as in freeze)

clerk (*er* as in serve)

geyser (*ey* as in fry)

new (*ew* as in soon)

tomato (*a* as in late)

mobile (*rhymes with noble*)

**Brit. English**

apricot (*a* as in tape)

progress (*o* as in grow)

simultaneous (*i* as in him)

semi (*i* as in bit)

leisure (*ei* as in let)

clerk (*er* as in dark)

geyser (*ey* as in freeze)

new (*ew* as in you)

tomato (*a* as in part)

mobile (*-bile* as in mile)

Often it is the stress on one syllable or the other which is different:

**Am. English**

debris

momentarily (*a* as in air)

(*meaning* in a moment)

advertisement (*i* as in fry)

aluminum

**Brit. English**

debris

momentarily (*a* almost not

heard at all) (*meaning* for a moment)

advertisement (*i* as in bit)

aluminium (*note different spelling*)

Finally, there are a number of differences between American and British English in the spelling of words, e.g. check (US)/cheque (UK); center (US)/ centre (UK). Many American English words ending in *or*, e.g. honor, vigor, labor are spelt in British English with an *our*, e.g. honour, vigour, labour. Many verbs in American English with *ize* or *izing* forms, e.g. organize, realizing, are spelt in British English *ise* or *ising*, e.g. organise, realising. In American English, “practice” is used both for the verb and noun. In British English, the verb is spelt “practise,” and the noun “practice.” In the main, American English avoids the doubling up of consonants in nouns and verbs while British English does not. In American English, for example, one writes “travel, traveled, traveling, traveler”, while in British English, one writes “travel, travelled, travelling, traveller”.

It was once predicted that British and American English would draw so far apart that eventually they would become separate languages. The opposite has happened. The links between the two countries are so strong that linguistically, and probably culturally too, they are closer together than ever.

(from *Background to the USA*, Richard Musman)

- Give the American English for the following British English words and phrases:

British English	American English
biscuit	.....
curtain	.....
to fill in a form	.....
rubbish	.....
from Monday to Friday	.....
bill (in shop, restaurant, etc.)	.....
to queue	.....
What's the time, please?	.....
twenty-five past six.	.....
How do you do?	.....
at the moment	.....

- Complete the chart below to obtain a summary of differences between American English and British English.

	AMERICAN ENGLISH	BRITISH ENGLISH
<b>Spelling</b>	..... ..... ..... ..... .....	..... ..... ..... ..... .....
<b>Grammar and vocabulary</b>	..... ..... ..... ..... .....	..... ..... ..... ..... .....
<b>Pronunciation</b>	..... ..... ..... ..... .....	..... ..... ..... ..... .....

### **The end of the melting pot?**

If present levels of immigration continue, by the year 2050 America's population will increase by 50 per cent to 383 million.

More importantly the racial balance will change. Hispanics will overtake Blacks (or African Americans, as they are now called) to become the largest minority at 21 per cent. Asians and Pacific Islanders will increase five times to more than 12 per cent. This will push the total of minorities to over 50 per cent of the population.

The USA is a country of immigrants, but today's newcomers are different. Immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became part of the great American melting pot. They learnt the language and integrated into the culture of their new home. But today's immigrants keep their own culture. They have their own TV channels, daily newspapers and magazines.

The English language has almost disappeared in many places. Parts of Florida, California and Texas are now Spanish-speaking. The Hispanic community is a billion dollar market and companies produce adverts in Spanish. In a huge supermarket in Rockville, Maryland, every customer is from the Far East. You'll hear Japanese, Korean and Chinese, but you won't hear any English. And this language problem won't get any better. Immigrant parents are demanding education for their children in their own language. If this happens, it will soon be possible to grow up in America and never speak English.

Politicians are asking: How far will this go? What kind of country will it produce? Senator Robert Byrd, a Democrat from West Virginia recently told the Senate: 'When I phone the local garage I can't understand the person on the other end of the line and he can't understand me. These people are all over the place and they don't speak English. Do we want more of this?' Both Democrats and Republicans are demanding strict immigration controls.

The biggest problems is illegal immigration. African Americans are very worried about this, because the illegal immigrants compete with them for houses, schools and especially jobs. Work is the key to the problem. While the white middle classes complain, many of them (including politicians and lawyers) employ illegal immigrants as cheap nannies, housekeepers, gardeners, chauffeurs and maids. And if there are jobs, the immigrants will continue to come.

(from *Life Lines, Pre-intermediate Student's book, Tom Hutchinson*)

- **Write T for true and F for false. Correct the false statements**

1. ....African Americans will be the largest minority in the US.
2. ....Immigrants always try to integrate into American culture.
3. ....Nowadays minority communities have their own newspapers and magazines.
4. ....Many immigrants need not speak English at all.
5. ....Immigrant parents want their children to be taught in their own language.
6. ....Politicians want stricter immigration controls.
7. ....Many American people employ illegal immigrants because they work better.

- ***Answer the following questions.***

1. What is the article about?
2. Why are today's immigrants different from earlier immigrants?
3. What are African Americans worried about?

## **Sources**

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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States)

Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, OUP 1999

Background to the USA, Richard Musman, Macmillan Publishers, 1990

Spotlight on the USA, Randee Falk, OUP, 1993

Life Lines Student's book pre-intermediate, Tom Hutchinson, OUP 1997, pp. 34-35

## **Suggested reading**

Portrait of the USA, published by the United States Information Agency, 1979  
<http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/factover/homepage.htm>

"Melting pot" America  
<http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4931534>