

Important People in United States History and Government

The following list highlights the key people other than Presidents who are included in the New York State Core Curriculum for United States History

and Government and therefore may be tested on the Regents Examinations. They represent the pluralism that is America.

Ansel Adams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Photographer whose natural landscapes of the West are also a statement about the importance of the preservation of the wilderness
Samuel Adams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bostonian American Revolutionary War leader, political organizer, and journalist who helped to organize the Sons of Liberty and the Massachusetts Committee of Correspondence Associated with the Boston Massacre and the Boston Tea Party Member of the Continental Congress and signer of the Declaration of Independence
Jane Addams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progressive Era reformer in the social settlement house movement Founder of Hull House, a Chicago settlement house Cofounder and first president of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Corecipient of the Nobel Peace Prize (1931) Involved in organizing of the NAACP
Susan B. Anthony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's rights leader from 1851 until her death in 1906 Most active for women's suffrage, but also worked for women's property rights and rights of married women
Yasir Arafat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Palestinian leader involved in efforts to negotiate peace in the Middle East during President Clinton's administration Led Palestinians during a number of violent clashes with Israel
Osama bin Laden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leader of the al-Qaeda terrorist network Directed the September 11, 2001, attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon
John Brown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extreme abolitionist who believed in use of violence to promote his cause Became nationally known after his antislavery group killed proslavery settlers at the Pottawatomie Creek Massacre His raid against a federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry led to his trial and execution. Considered a martyr by some antislavery groups and was immortalized by Ralph Waldo Emerson in <i>John Brown's Body</i>
William Jennings Bryan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsuccessful Democratic presidential candidate in 1896 and 1900 Populist who supported farmers and free silver Orator, religious fundamentalist (Scopes Trial), and anti-imperialist

John C. Calhoun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outspoken southern leader and advocate of states' rights • Favored nullification and the extension of slavery into the territories • Vice President under Presidents John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson; resigned over nullification issue • Secretary of state under President Tyler; successfully pressed for Texas annexation; opposed Mexican War and California statehood
Andrew Carnegie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrialist and philanthropist who built Carnegie Steel Company, later part of U.S. Steel • In an article, <i>The Gospel of Wealth</i> (1889) he defended Social Darwinism, but also stated that the rich had a duty to help the poor, and improve society in areas they deemed important.
Rachel Carson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writer, scientist, and environmentalist whose book, <i>Silent Spring</i> (1962), identified the hazards of agricultural pesticides • Inspired the environmental movement and legislation
Willa Cather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pulitzer Prize winning writer of stories and novels about the struggle and the strength of the pioneers settling the frontier • Best known for <i>O Pioneers!</i> (1913), <i>My Antonia</i> (1918), <i>One of Ours</i> (1922), and <i>Death Comes to the Archbishop</i> (1927)
Cesar Chavez	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latino leader of California farm workers from 1962 until his death in 1993 • Organized the United Farm Workers (UFW) to help migrant farm workers gain better pay and working conditions
Winston Churchill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prime minister of Great Britain during World War II
Father Charles Coughlin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roman Catholic priest who used his weekly radio program to attack President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal programs • Lost popularity because of his pro-fascist, anti-Semitic views; ordered by the Roman Catholic Church in 1942 to stop his political actions
Eugene V. Debs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union organizer and Socialist presidential candidate in every election from the 1890s until World War I
Dorothea Dix	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nineteenth-century social reformer who revolutionized mental health reform; Superintendent of U.S. Army nurses in Civil War
Stephen Douglas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illinois Senator whose Kansas-Nebraska Act included his idea of popular sovereignty, which increased sectional tensions. • Lincoln-Douglas debates (1858) made Lincoln nationally known. • Candidate of northern faction of Democratic party in 1860 election
Frederick Douglass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former slave, abolitionist, lecturer, active in Underground Railroad • Supported Women's Suffrage, attended Seneca Falls Convention
W.E.B. Du Bois	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American civil rights leader, historian, writer, sociologist • Cofounder of Niagara Movement and of NAACP • Influenced Harlem Renaissance by publishing African Americans in <i>The Crisis</i>. • Opposed Marcus Garvey's "back to Africa" movement and disagreed with Booker T. Washington by pressing for civil and political, not just economic equality for African Americans

John Foster Dulles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretary of state under President Dwight Eisenhower • Made famous the concept of brinkmanship, a foreign policy that brought the United States just to the brink of war
Adolf Eichmann	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nazi war criminal captured in Argentina after World War II, then tried and executed in Israel for the deaths of millions of Jews during World War II
Duke Ellington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Songwriter, band leader, jazz composer, pianist, and a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance • Helped popularize American music around the world • Famous songs include "Take the A Train," "Mood Indigo," and "Don't Get Around Much Anymore."
Medgar Evers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American activist and NAACP field secretary • Murdered in Mississippi in 1963 by a sniper outside his house
F. Scott Fitzgerald	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novelist whose works reflect climate of the "roaring twenties" • Novels include <i>The Great Gatsby</i>, and <i>Tender Is the Night</i>.
Henry Ford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrialist who headed Ford Motor Company • His innovative production methods reduced the cost of producing cars, making it possible for the average person to own an automobile.
Benjamin Franklin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philadelphia statesman, diplomat, scientist, writer in revolutionary period • Drafted the 1754 Albany Plan of Union • Member of Second Continental Congress; served on committee to write the Declaration of Independence, which he signed • Helped persuade France to sign the 1778 Treaty of Alliance against England and helped negotiate the Treaty of Paris of 1783, ending American Revolution • Influential Pennsylvania delegate to the Constitutional Convention
Sigmund Freud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austrian psychiatrist who developed psychoanalysis • Theories emphasized the importance of sexual freedom; influenced attitudes of the 1920s.
Betty Friedan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's rights activist whose book, <i>The Feminine Mystique</i> (1963), encouraged women to find their own identity outside marriage • Helped found National Organization for Women (1966) and National Women's Political Caucus (1971)
Marcus Garvey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American nationalist leader who advocated pride and self-help as a means of empowerment • Founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, a nationalist and separatist group that wanted a separate black economy and urged African Americans to emigrate to Africa • Ideas influenced the 1960s Black Power movement
Samuel Gompers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizer and president of American Federation of Labor, a craft union for skilled workers; stressed issues such as wages and hours

Alexander Hamilton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New York delegate at Constitutional Convention who worked for a strong central government • Wrote 51 of <i>The Federalist Papers</i> supporting ratifying the Constitution • First secretary of the treasury; promoted national economic development
William Randolph Hearst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspaper publisher whose yellow journalism style helped create public pressure for the Spanish-American War
Ernest Hemingway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novelist whose writings expressed conflict and concern created by changing American values • 1954 Nobel Prize for Literature winner
Patrick Henry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader in the American Revolution in Virginia • As a member of Virginia House of Burgesses, introduced resolutions opposing the Stamp Act • Member of Continental Congress; supporter of independence • Opposed Constitution because of belief that it gave too much power to the federal government • Led movement for addition of the Bill of Rights to the Constitution
Alger Hiss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former State Department official investigated as a possible Communist spy by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) • Prosecution by Richard Nixon which made Nixon a national figure when Hiss was convicted of perjury in 1950
Langston Hughes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poet, playwright, and novelist who wrote about the African American experience, especially that of the poor and working class • A leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance
Saddam Hussein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-time, ruthless Iraqi dictator • Invaded Kuwait causing Persian Gulf War in 1991; removed from power by U.S. during Iraq War in 2003
Chiang Kai-shek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader of the Chinese Nationalists in civil war; when defeated by Mao Zedong in 1949 left China and established a government in Taiwan
Robert Kennedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attorney general (1961–1963) and brother of President John F. Kennedy • Assassinated in June 1968
Martin Luther King, Jr.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil rights leader who advocated civil disobedience and nonviolent demonstrations as methods for achieving change • Founded Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957 • Led bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama • Led march from Selma to Montgomery for voting rights • Gave “I Have a Dream” speech in Washington, D.C. • Won Nobel Peace Prize • Assassinated in 1968

Henry Kissinger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretary of state under Presidents Nixon and Ford • Deeply involved in foreign policy in Vietnam, China, the Soviet Union, and the Middle East • Advised Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton
Robert La Follette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor of Wisconsin whose program, the “Wisconsin Idea,” became the model for progressive reform • Served as United States senator and Progressive leader • Ran for President as the Progressive party candidate in 1924
Meriwether Lewis and William Clark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explorers who led the 1804–1806 expedition to survey lands included in the Louisiana Purchase • Documented the land, plants, animals, and other natural resources from Missouri to Oregon in maps, diaries, and drawings
Sinclair Lewis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novelist whose work <i>Main Street</i> attacked middle class values • First American to win Nobel Prize for Literature (1930)
John Locke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • British Enlightenment writer whose ideas influenced the Declaration of Independence, state constitutions, and the United States Constitution • Believed that people are born free with certain natural rights, including the rights to life, liberty, and property
Henry Cabot Lodge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massachusetts Republican senator whose support of American imperialism and of a powerful navy strongly influenced Theodore Roosevelt • As chairman of Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Senate Majority leader, led successful fight against ratification of the Treaty of Versailles and entry of the United States into the League of Nations • Served as a U.S. representative to Washington Conference
Huey Long	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Populist governor of Louisiana and U.S. senator • Proposed that income and inheritance taxes on the wealthy be used to give each American a \$2,500 income, a car, and a college education • Planned to challenge FDR for President, but was assassinated in 1935
Douglas MacArthur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led U.S. troops in the Pacific in World War II • Commander of U.S. occupation forces in Japan after World War II • Relieved of command by Truman after publicly disagreeing with him about the conduct of the Korean War
Malcolm X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader of the 1960s Black Power movement • Assassinated in 1965
Horace Mann	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nineteenth century educator, lawyer, and public official whose support helped create tax-based, nonsectarian public schools free to all children as well as better teacher-training institutions
George C. Marshall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Army chief of staff during World War II and secretary of state under President Truman promoted the Marshall Plan, which assisted the economic recovery of Europe after World War II

John Marshall	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chief justice of the United States (1801–1835)• Established prestige of the Supreme Court and strengthened power of federal government in cases such as <i>Marbury v. Madison</i>, <i>McCulloch v. Maryland</i>, and <i>Gibbons v. Ogden</i>.• First stated the right of judicial review in <i>Marbury v. Madison</i> (1803).
Cotton Mather	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New England Puritan associated with the concept of the Puritan work ethic (meaning that hard work is its own reward) and an appreciation of thrift and industry• Supported the Salem witch trials
Joseph R. McCarthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Republican Senator of the late 1940s and early 1950s who led a campaign to root out suspected Communists in American life• The term <i>McCarthyism</i> came to be associated with an era of government investigation of the private lives of many in public service and in the entertainment industry.
Baron de Montesquieu	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• French Enlightenment philosopher who admired the British system of republican government• Influence is seen in separation of powers and in the checks and balances provisions in the Constitution.
John Muir	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Naturalist, conservationist, and writer; influenced President Theodore Roosevelt to protect more land; founded the Sierra Club
Ralph Nader	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consumer rights crusader; wrote <i>Unsafe at Any Speed</i> (1965) to expose the lack of safety standards for cars• Third party presidential candidate (1996, 2000, 2004)
Frank Norris	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Naturalist writer whose 1901 novel, <i>The Octopus</i>, told of the struggle between the railroad and California wheat growers
Robert Oppenheimer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physicist who led the American effort to build the first atomic bomb
Thomas Paine	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• English-born writer and political philosopher whose influential pamphlet <i>Common Sense</i> (1776) pressed for independence from Great Britain
Rosa Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• African American civil rights activist whose 1955 refusal to give up her seat to a white person led to the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott and helped launch the civil rights movement.
Frances Perkins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social reformer and political leader• Named secretary of labor under President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933, becoming the first woman to serve in a cabinet position
H. Ross Perot	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Third-party candidate and billionaire businessman who challenged George Bush and Bill Clinton for the presidency in 1992 with new ideas about balancing the federal budget and about other economic issues
Matthew Perry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Led 1853–1854 naval mission to open Japan to world trade and negotiated U.S. trading rights with Japan (Treaty of Kanagawa)

Gifford Pinchot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservationist and politician who led the Division of Forestry of the Department of Agriculture under President Theodore Roosevelt • Dismissed by Taft after attacking the Secretary of the Interior for removing from federal protection about a million acres of land
Joseph Pulitzer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publisher of the <i>New York Journal</i>, whose "yellow journalism" in a circulation war with William Randolph Hearst helped provoke the Spanish-American War
al-Qaeda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International terrorist network founded by Osama bin Laden in 1980s whose goal is to establish governments based on Islamic law and without Western influence • Responsible for terrorist training camps, 9/11/01 attack on the World Trade Center and many attacks and threats all over the world
Yitzhak Rabin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prime minister of Israel who signed a peace agreement with PLO leader Yasir Arafat in 1993 as a result of President Clinton's efforts • Assassinated in 1995
Jacob Riis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journalist, photographer, and social reformer of the Progressive Era • Used writings and photographs to show the need for better housing for the poor, such as in his 1890 book <i>How the Other Half Lives</i>
Jackie Robinson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional baseball player • Became the first African American to play in major league baseball when he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947
John D. Rockefeller	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrialist and philanthropist • Founder of the Standard Oil Company
Nelson A. Rockefeller	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former governor of New York who was appointed Vice President by President Gerald Ford in 1974 • Only nonelected Vice President to serve with a nonelected President
Eleanor Roosevelt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political activist and First Lady • Early and long-time activist for rights for African Americans and women during the New Deal as First Lady and as political activist on her own • Played a key role in creation of United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (1948) and heading the UN Commission on Human Rights (1961) • Chaired the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women during the Kennedy Administration
Julius and Ethel Rosenberg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convicted and executed for treason in 1953 during the era of McCarthyism; innocence is still debated
Jean-Jacques Rousseau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • French Enlightenment philosopher • Influenced the Declaration of Independence with his arguments in support of government by the consent of the governed
Sacajawea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Native American guide for part of the Lewis and Clark expedition • Honored in 2000 with her image on a dollar coin

Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Italian immigrants and anarchists executed for armed robbery and murder at the height of the antiradical, anti-immigrant feelings of the 1920s Cleared by the Massachusetts governor in 1977, some 50 years later
Margaret Sanger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pioneering advocate of birth control Organized first American birth control conference in 1921 Founder of a birth-control lobbying group that became Planned Parenthood in 1942
Upton Sinclair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Muckraking journalist of the Progressive Era Influenced the passage of the 1906 Meat Inspection Act with his novel <i>The Jungle</i>, which deals with the exploitation of the poor and the factory conditions that led to contaminated meat
Adam Smith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In <i>The Wealth of Nations</i> (1776), this Scottish political economist rejected mercantilism and advocated a free enterprise system, the basis of modern capitalism. He argued for free trade, the division of labor, competition, individual freedom, supply and demand, and <i>laissez-faire</i> as necessary for a sound economy.
Alfred E. Smith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reform governor of New York and first Catholic to run for President Lost to Hoover in the 1928 election, largely because voters did not want a Catholic President and because Smith favored repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment Right-wing conservative Democrat who helped organized American Liberty League (1934) and opposed New Deal
Bessie Smith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harlem Renaissance blues singer known as the "Empress of the Blues" Recorded with prominent jazz musicians, such as Louis Armstrong and Benny Goodman
Elizabeth Cady Stanton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading crusader for women's rights; also for abolition and temperance Began women's rights movement with Seneca Falls Convention in New York in 1848; wrote Declaration of Sentiments (1848) With Susan B. Anthony, cofounded the National Woman Suffrage Association and coedited <i>Revolution</i>, a women's rights journal
Lincoln Steffens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Muckraking journalist, editor, and reformer; wrote about corruption in government and business in his 1906 novel, <i>The Shame of the Cities</i>
John Steinbeck	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Author whose novels often deal with problems of the working class during the Great Depression <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> (Pulitzer Prize, 1939) describes the effect of the drought that created the Dust Bowl on a group of farmers forced to leave Oklahoma and work as migrant laborers in California.
Harriet Beecher Stowe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writer whose emotional, controversial, and best selling novel, <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> (1850), focused attention on slavery and contributed to the start of the Civil War

Ida Tarbell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muckraking journalist whose <i>History of Standard Oil Company</i> exposed Rockefeller's unfair and often ruthless business practices.
Norman Thomas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political leader, minister, pacifist who ran six times as Socialist party candidate for President • Supporter of moderate social reforms, strongly anticommunist • Helped organize the American Civil Liberties Union and urged nuclear disarmament
Dr. Francis Townsend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opponent of the New Deal who promoted a financially impossible plan to provide government pensions for the elderly
Mark Twain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author and humorist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, famous, in part, for his homespun stories about life along the Mississippi River • Mark Twain was the pen name of Samuel L. Clemens.
Voltaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • French Enlightenment philosopher who praised British institutions and rights and influenced framers of the Constitution • Wrote against religious intolerance and persecution
Earl Warren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief justice of the Supreme Court (1953–1969) • Landmark cases such as <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> and <i>Miranda v. Arizona</i> marked his tenure.
Booker T. Washington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American educator, author, and leader • Founded Tuskegee Institute (1881) and wrote <i>Up from Slavery</i> (1901) • Urged vocational education and self-improvement rather than confrontation as the way for African Americans to gain racial equality
Ida Wells-Barnett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American journalist, suffragist, and reformer • Launched a national crusade against lynching in the 1890s • Cofounder of the NAACP and of the National Association of Colored Women
Edith Wharton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1920s novelist who expressed concern about old versus new values in books such as <i>The Age of Innocence</i> (1921)
Mao Zedong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader of the communist Chinese government from 1949 until 1976 • Met with President Nixon on Nixon's historic trip to China in 1972
John Peter Zenger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • German immigrant, printer and journalist • Tried for criminal libel for criticizing New York governor in his paper; jury found him not guilty on the grounds that he had printed the truth. • His case was an early step in establishing freedom of the press.