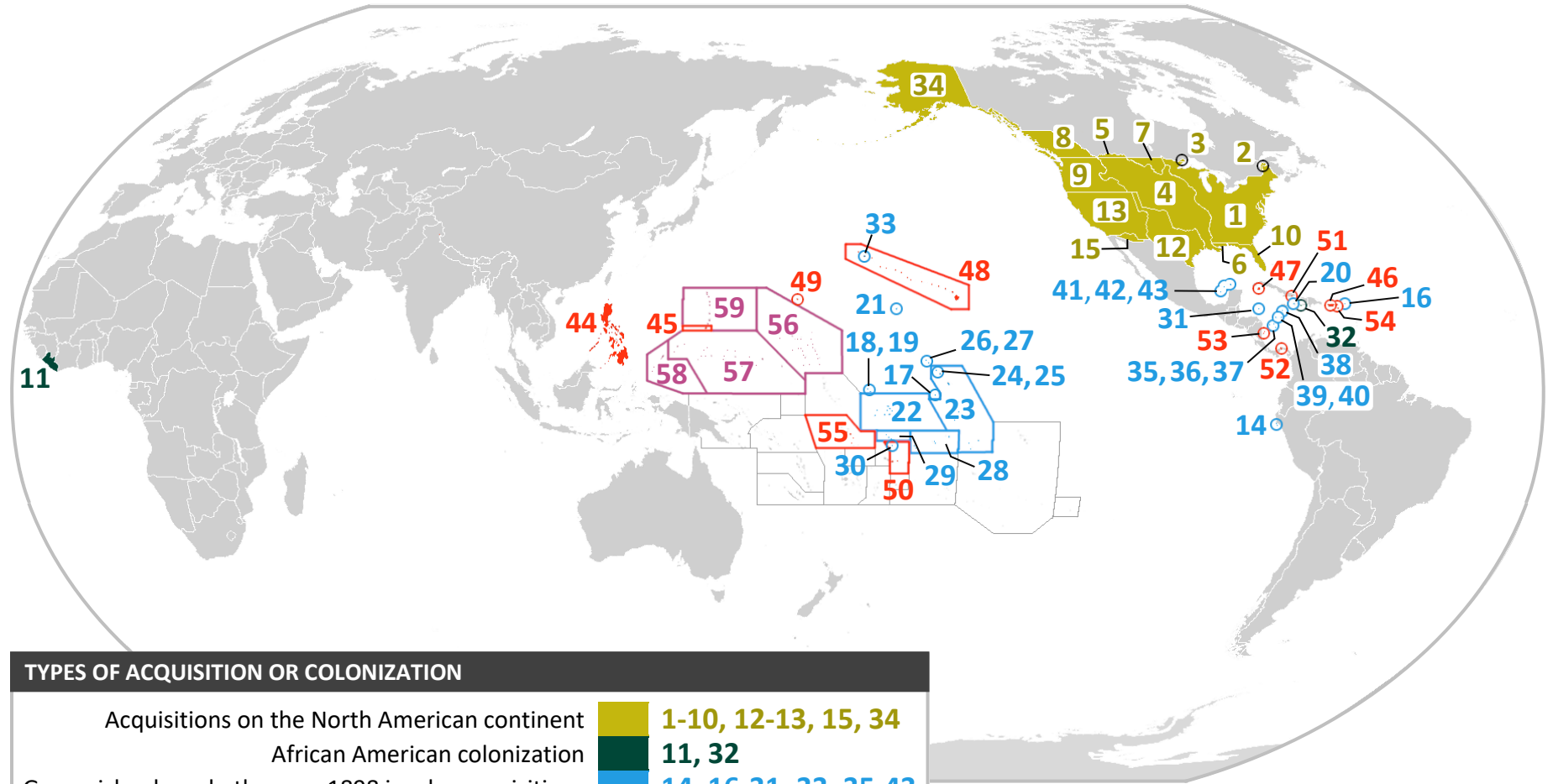


# The United States – historical

*Territories claimed, disputed, or colonized by the United States since 1783*



TYPES OF ACQUISITION OR COLONIZATION	
Acquisitions on the North American continent	1-10, 12-13, 15, 34
African American colonization	11, 32
Guano islands and other pre-1898 insular acquisitions	14, 16-31, 33, 35-43
Acquisitions following the Spanish-American War	44-55
Acquisitions following World War II	56-59

Numbers correspond to entries on the accompanying historical table.



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## The United States – historical

*Territories claimed, disputed, or colonized by the United States since 1783*

Numbers in the left-hand margin correspond to locations marked on the accompanying map (color-coded by type of acquisition or colonization). Territories are listed chronologically by the year they were first acquired, claimed, disputed, or colonized, with occasional exceptions to group together territories with converging histories.

This table tracks territorial competition among colonizing states (e.g., the United States vs. Britain). It does not, generally speaking, track competition between the colonizing states and indigenous peoples (e.g., the United States vs. the Cherokee Nation). That would be a different way to narrate the history of US expansion—one that would require considerably more space to narrate.

	TERRITORY	TIME SPAN	HISTORY IN SUM	HISTORY IN GREATER DETAIL
1	Original US territory (13 states plus trans-Appalachian west)	1783-present	Taken from Britain by war.	After winning independence, the US negotiated with Britain, Spain, and France to set the new nation's boundaries. Early on, the US demanded that Britain cede all of Quebec and Nova Scotia, as well as the territory between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River that Britain had taken from France after the Seven Years War in 1763. In the end, Britain ceded the trans-Appalachian territory but kept Nova Scotia and the portion of Quebec north of the Great Lakes. Florida, which Britain had taken from Spain in 1763, was returned to Spain as part of the 1783 settlement.
2	Halifax Road corridor	1783-1842	Claimed from Britain by war. Ceded back to Britain.	The 1783 treaty that defined the US's original territory was unclear about the boundaries of Maine (then part of Massachusetts). After local clashes in the 1830s, dubbed the Aroostook War, the US and Britain compromised in 1842. The territory ceded by the US included part of the Halifax Road, an important connector among Britain's colonies in the region.
3	Kam–Dog–Maligne Route sector	1783-1842	Claimed from Britain by war. Ceded back to Britain.	The 1783 treaty that defined the US's border just west of Lake Superior was based on a faulty map. As a result, the US and Britain advanced competing arguments for where the border should be, based on different routes through the region formerly used by French fur traders. In 1842, the two nations compromised, each ceding some of the territory it had been claiming.

4	Louisiana Purchase	1803-present	Purchased from France. Portions ceded to Spain, then retaken from Mexico.	<p>France claimed this territory until the end of the Seven Years War in 1763, when the claim passed to Spain. In 1800, the French negotiated with Spain to regain the claim, hoping to revive their North American empire. The French soon abandoned that hope, however, when their most lucrative American colony, Saint-Domingue, won independence as Haiti. France then sold off the Louisiana territory to the US, in 1803, for \$15 million.</p> <p>In 1819, as part of the deal that gave East Florida to the US (see entry 10 of this table), the US ceded to Spain portions of the Louisiana Purchase that fell within the boundaries Spain claimed for Texas. The US regained what it had ceded to Spain when it annexed Texas from Mexico in 1845 (entry 12).</p>
5	Northern Mississippi watershed	1803-1818	Purchased from France. Ceded to Britain.	<p>The Louisiana Purchase was defined as the entire western Mississippi River watershed. The watershed reaches north of the 49th parallel; but the US ceded that portion to Britain in 1818, when the two nations adopted the parallel as their expanding western border.</p>
6	West Florida	1810-present	Taken from Spain, and from independent US settlers, by military force.	<p>The US claimed that this territory was part of the Louisiana Purchase; Spain denied that. In 1810, US settlers revolted from Spanish rule and declared an independent Republic of West Florida. In the same year, the US sent a military force to take control of the territory, which they did without armed resistance. Spain formally ceded the territory in 1819, together with East Florida (see entry 10 of this table).</p>
7	Red River basin	1818-present	Ceded by Britain.	<p>This basin was initially part of a British claim called Rupert’s Land. Britain ceded the portion of the basin south of the 49th parallel to the US when, in 1818, the two nations adopted the parallel as their expanding western border.</p>
8	Northern Oregon Country	1818-1846	Jointly occupied with Britain until ceded <i>to</i> Britain.	<p>Spain, Russia, Britain, and the US all claimed the Oregon Country, but Spain and Russia ceded their claims. In 1818, Britain and the US agreed to jointly occupy the territory. That arrangement continued until 1846, when Britain and the US extended the 49th-parallel boundary to the Pacific, thus splitting the territory, with Britain taking the northern portion and the US the southern portion. Prior to the split, some Americans had advocated annexing the entire Oregon Country, by war if necessary—hence the slogan, “Fifty-four forty or fight,” referring to the Oregon Country’s northernmost latitude.</p>
9	Southern Oregon Country	1818-present	Jointly occupied with Britain until ceded <i>by</i> Britain.	

<b>10</b>	East Florida	1819-present	Ceded by Spain after US invasion.	The US invaded this Spanish territory to combat Seminoles and maroons living there. In the process, US forces seized Spanish forts, thereby taking control of much of the colonized portion of the territory. In 1819, Spain ceded East Florida to the US as part of a deal in which the US ceded to Spain portions of the Louisiana Purchase that overlapped with Texas.
<b>11</b>	Liberia	1822-1854	Colonized by US settlers. Granted independence.	Beginning in 1822, thousands of African Americans settled on the West African coast, coalescing into two colony-states: “Liberia” and “Maryland in Liberia.” Liberia obtained independence from its sponsoring US-based colonization society in 1847. Maryland in Liberia did likewise in 1854, after which it merged with Liberia. The US never claimed these colonies as possessions; but US governments (federal and state) helped fund the colonies, and the US provided financial and military aid to Liberia after independence.
<b>12</b>	Texas	1845-present	Taken from Mexico by a US settlers’ revolt.	In 1836, Americans who had emigrated to the Mexican territory of Texas revolted against Mexican rule and declared an independent republic. The US admitted the Republic of Texas as a state in 1845. Texas’s annexation by the US was delayed by two factors: the threat of war with Mexico (which did not recognize Texan independence) and political conflict in the US over slavery (since Texas would be a slave state).
<b>13</b>	Mexican Cession	1848-present	Taken from Mexico by war (but also paid for).	Annexing Texas led the US to war with Mexico. When the US won, in 1848, it required Mexico to cede Alta California and Nuevo México in addition to Texas, although the US paid Mexico \$15 million “in consideration” of these territorial losses.  During the war, US settlers in Alta California declared a brief-lived California Republic (whose flag became the basis of California’s state flag). From 1849 to 1851, Mormon settlers—hoping, as Texas had done, to bypass territorial status and be admitted to the US directly as a state—declared a State of Deseret that included much of the Mexican Cession; the US did not recognize this entity, and Mormons relinquished the claim.
<b>14</b>	Lobos Islands	1852	Disputed with, and relinquished to, Peru.	The Lobos de Tierra and Lobos de Afuera islands were never formally claimed by the US; but in 1852, the US disputed Peru’s claim to the islands and pledged military protection for US companies extracting guano there. A few months later, after saber-rattling on both

sides, the US conceded Peruvian sovereignty. The incident helped prompt Congress to pass the Guano Islands Act, which procured US-controlled sources of guano by authorizing entrepreneurs to take possession of uninhabited islands not yet claimed by another nation.

<b>15</b>	Gadsen Purchase	1853-present	Purchased from Mexico.	The US purchased this territory in 1853, for \$10 million, to resolve a dispute with Mexico about New Mexico’s southern border and to gain terrain suitable for a transcontinental railroad. The US offered to purchase Baja California and other northern Mexican territories as well, but Mexico rejected those offers.
<b>16</b>	Sombrero Island	1856-1869	Occupied by US guano miners. Relinquished to Britain.	In 1863, the US and Britain disputed possession of Sombrero, which US guano miners had occupied since 1856. Because the miners had improperly filed their claim under the Guano Islands Act, the US did not assert possession, but claimed the right to do so in the future and questioned the grounds for Britain’s claim. Britain resolved the dispute by giving US miners a license to work the island. The US dropped Sombrero from its list of guano islands in 1869.
<b>17</b>	Jarvis Island	1856-present	Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Claimed for a time by Britain, then reclaimed by US.	Jarvis, Baker, and Howland were among the first claims the US made under the Guano Islands Act. After US guano miners abandoned the islands in the 1870s, British miners occupied them for a time, and by the 1890s Britain regarded them as possessions. By the 1930s, though, the islands were again abandoned, and Britain did not object when the US annexed them. Hawaiians, transplanted to the islands in a US colonization program, built lighthouses, weather stations, and an airfield. The islands were attacked by Japan during World War II; Baker became a US military base during the war. All three islands are now wildlife refuges.
<b>18</b>	Baker Island	1856-present		
<b>19</b>	Howland Island	1858-present		
<b>20</b>	Navassa Island	1858-present	Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Disputed with Haiti.	The US claimed Navassa for guano mining in 1858. When Haiti disputed the claim, the US sent military protection for its miners. In 1889, Navassa was the site of lethal conflict between white bosses and African American miners protesting slavery-like conditions. In 1917, the US erected a lighthouse on Navassa for traffic to and from the Panama Canal. The US continues to administer the island, now a wildlife refuge, over Haiti’s continuing objections.

21	Johnston Atoll	1859-present	Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Taken over by Hawai‘i, then annexed by US.	The US and the Kingdom of Hawai‘i both claimed Johnston in the late 1850s, but Hawai‘i conceded to the US. US guano miners abandoned the atoll by 1892, at which point Hawai‘i and Britain laid claim to it, with Britain conceding to Hawai‘i. The US resumed control of Johnston as a result of annexing Hawai‘i in 1898. Converted into a US military base, Johnston was used in the 20th century for testing biological and nuclear weapons, launching anti-satellite weapons, and storing and destroying chemical weapons. The base was closed in 2004; the atoll is now a wildlife refuge.
22	Phoenix Islands	1859-1979	Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Disputed with Britain. Ceded to Kiribati.	In 1859-60, the US claimed the six easternmost Line Islands and seven of the Phoenix Islands for guano mining. By 1939, the US was claiming all eight Phoenix Islands. (The US also claimed the five westernmost Line Islands: see entries 17 and 24-27 of this table.) When US miners neglected or abandoned these islands, Britain laid claim to them. The US protested Britain’s annexation of Kiritimati (Christmas), the largest of the Line Islands; Britain retained possession but later allowed the US to test nuclear weapons there. In 1939, Britain and the US agreed to jointly occupy two of the Phoenix Islands, Kanton and Enderbury; the US used Kanton as a military base during World War II and the Cold War.  After World War II, the US tried to negotiate undisputed control of all these islands, for military purposes, but Britain would not cede. Britain and the US both ceded their claims on these islands in 1979 to the newly independent Kiribati, a former British colony.
23	Line Islands, easternmost	1859-1979		
24	Tabuaeran (Fanning Island)	1860-1888	Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Relinquished to Britain.	The US claimed Tabuaeran and Teraina, two of the Line Islands, for guano mining in 1860. US and British entrepreneurs occupied the islands off and on, but the British presence proved most stable. Britain annexed the islands in 1888-89 with no US opposition. When the US ceded several other Line Islands claims to Kiribati in 1979, Tabuaeran and Teraina were not included because Kiribati’s claim to those two islands was already a given (inherited from Britain).
25	Teraina (Washington Island)	1860-1889		
26	Kingman Reef	1860-present	Claimed under the Guano Islands Act.	The US claimed the reef for guano mining in 1860; but since the reef is mostly submerged, it was never mined, nor did any other nation lay claim to it. Kingman was used as a commercial flight stopover in the 1930s and for US military defense in the 1940s. It is now a wildlife refuge.

27	Palmyra Atoll	1860-present	Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Defined for a time as part of Hawai‘i.	This uninhabited atoll was claimed by three nations: the US (1860), the Kingdom of Hawai‘i (1862), and Britain (1889), but Britain relinquished its claim. The US implicitly recognized Hawai‘i’s claim when, in 1898, the US annexed Hawai‘i and listed Palmyra as one of the possessions being annexed. However, when Hawai‘i was granted statehood, in 1959, Palmyra was excluded from the new state’s territory, thus remaining under federal control. Palmyra was a US military base during World War II, was later considered (but rejected) for a nuclear waste storage site, and is now a wildlife refuge.
28	Northern Cook Islands	1860-1980	Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Ceded to Cook Islands.	In 1860, the US claimed five of the Northern Cook Islands and two of the Tokelau Islands for guano mining. By 1939, the US was claiming all three Tokelau Islands. The US never occupied any of these islands, and in the 1880s they became part of the British empire, eventually designated as territories of New Zealand. Nevertheless, the US did not formally cede its claims to these islands until 1980. In that year, the US signed treaties recognizing the Tokelau Islands as a territory of New Zealand and renouncing its claims in the Cook Islands (which had been self-governing, in free association with New Zealand, since 1965).
29	Tokelau Islands	1860-1980	Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Ceded to New Zealand.	
30	Swains Island (Olohega)	1860-present	Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Separately colonized by US settlers. Disputed with Britain, later with Tokelau.	The US claimed Swains for guano mining in 1860, but it was never mined. Around the same time, independent of the Guano Islands Act, Swains was colonized by a US family, who ruled the island for decades as a private quasi-state. Britain claimed the island as well, but conceded to the US due to the colonists’ presence. In 1925, the US annexed Swains to American Samoa (entry 50 of this table).  Tokelauans claim Swains, called Olohega, as part of their historic territory. However, Tokelau is currently a territory of New Zealand, which recognizes the US claim to Swains.
31	Swan Islands	1862-1972	Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Ceded to Honduras.	The US claimed the Swan Islands for guano mining in 1862. In the 20th century, the US built weather and communications facilities there, including a radio station that broadcast anti-Castro propaganda to Cuba. Honduras disputed the US’s claim starting in the 1920s. In 1972, the US signed a treaty conceding Honduran sovereignty but securing the right to keep using its facilities.

32	Île-à-Vache	1863-1864	Briefly colonized by US settlers.	In 1863, 450 newly emancipated African Americans settled in a colony sponsored by the US government on Île-à-Vache, off the southern coast of Haiti. The colony was disastrously mismanaged by its white governor; within a year, the US repatriated the survivors.
33	Midway Atoll	1867-present	Claimed by US military.	A US warship claimed this uninhabited atoll in the Hawaiian island chain in 1867 to use as a coaling station. Although the Kingdom of Hawai‘i claimed the rest of the island chain in the 1880s, Hawai‘i recognized Midway as a US possession. Midway remained a separate entity from the rest of the island chain even after the US annexed Hawai‘i in 1898. Used as a commercial flight stopover in the 1930s, Midway served as a US military base during World War II and throughout the Cold War. It is now a wildlife refuge.
34	Alaska	1867-present	Purchased from Russia. Borders disputed with Britain and Russia.	<p>After Russia ceded its claims in Oregon Country to the US and Britain in the 1820s (see entries 8-9 of this table), Alaska was Russia’s only remaining North American territory. By 1867, Russia feared losing Alaska to Britain by war and therefore let the US purchase the territory instead, for \$7 million.</p> <p>Britain, representing Canada, disputed US claims about Alaska’s land border in the panhandle, as well as US jurisdiction over the Bering Sea, which Britain asserted was international waters. An international tribunal settled the Bering Sea dispute in Britain’s favor in 1893; Britain and the US settled the land border dispute by compromise in 1903. The US and the Soviet Union renegotiated Alaska’s sea border in 1990, shortly before the Soviet Union broke apart. Post-Soviet Russia has refused to ratify that agreement because Russian fishers want new negotiations, but the US maintains that the matter is closed.</p>
35	Serrana Bank	1868-1972	Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Disputed with Nicaragua. Ceded to Colombia.	The US claimed this island for guano mining in 1868. Colombia and Nicaragua both lodged counterclaims; nevertheless, the US continued to administer the island, erecting a lighthouse on it for traffic to and from the Panama Canal. In 1928, the US and Colombia agreed to joint use of the island without resolving the question of possession. In 1972, the US signed a treaty ceding the island to Colombia but retaining fishing rights

<b>36</b>	Quita Sueño Bank	1869-1972	} Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Disputed with Honduras. Ceded to Colombia.	The US claimed these islands for guano mining in 1869. Colombia and Honduras both lodged counterclaims; nevertheless, the US continued to administer the islands, erecting lighthouses on them for traffic to and from the Panama Canal. In 1928, the US and Colombia agreed to joint use of the islands without resolving the question of possession. In 1972, the US signed a treaty ceding the islands to Colombia but retaining fishing rights.
<b>37</b>	Roncador Bank	1869-1972		
<b>38</b>	Pedro Cays	1869-1878	Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Relinquished to Britain.	The US claimed Pedro Cays for guano mining in 1869, unaware that Britain had annexed the island in 1863. In 1878, the US consul in Jamaica informed the US State Department of the British claim. In 1884, US customs seized a British ship transporting cargo from Pedro Cays, since the US Treasury still listed the island as a US possession; the State Department ordered the ship released, and Pedro Cays de-listed, on the basis of the 1878 consul's report.
<b>39</b>	Bajo Nuevo Bank (Petrel Island)	1869-present	} Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Disputed with Colombia.	The US claimed Bajo Nuevo in 1869, and Serranilla in 1880, for guano mining; but probably neither was ever mined. Colombia also claims—and, in fact, administers—the still uninhabited islands. However, the US has not relinquished its claim, despite having ceded some other disputed islands to Colombia in 1972. The US asserts its claim to sovereignty over these islands by conducting naval patrols.
<b>40</b>	Serranilla Bank	1880-present		
<b>41</b>	Arenas Key	1879-1894	} Claimed under the Guano Islands Act. Relinquished to Mexico.	The US claimed these three islands for guano mining between 1879 and 1884. Mexico, asserting prior rights to the islands, expelled US miners from Arenas in 1881. In 1894, the US acceded to Mexican protests and dropped these claims from its list of guano islands.
<b>42</b>	Western Triangle Isl.	1880-1894		
<b>43</b>	Scorpion Reef	1884-1894		
<b>44</b>	Philippines	1898-1946	Taken from Spain by war (but also paid for). Retained by war against	The Philippines became a Spanish possession in the 1500s. After losing the Spanish-American War, Spain ceded the islands to the US but received \$20 million in compensation. Filipinos immediately declared an independent Philippine Republic, which the US did not recognize, resulting in the Philippine-American War. The US defeated the

			Filipinos. Occupied by Japan, then retaken. Granted independence.	Republic in 1902 but spent another decade putting down other rebellions in the islands. From 1902 to 1946, the US incrementally expanded Philippine self-government; the process was interrupted when Japan seized the islands during World War II, but by 1946 the US had granted the Philippines full independence. After independence, the US briefly claimed—but then relinquished—continuing territorial sovereignty over its military bases in the Philippines.
<b>45</b>	Guam	1898-present	Taken from Spain by war. Occupied by Japan, then retaken.	<p>Guam is the southernmost of the Mariana Islands, which were claimed by Spain starting in the 1500s. The US demanded Guam, but not the rest of the Marianas, as part of the peace settlement that ended the Spanish-American War. Guam was then used by the US as a naval base. The island was occupied in 1941 by Japan but recaptured by the US in 1944. During the Vietnam War, Guam was a processing center for Vietnamese refugees. US military bases occupy over one-fourth of the island's land.</p> <p>For its first 50 years as a US territory, Guam was under military rule. Guamanians were granted US citizenship and partial self-government in 1950. In the 1950s-60s, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands unsuccessfully petitioned the US and the United Nations for reunification (see entry 59 of this table).</p>
<b>46</b>	Puerto Rico	1898-present	Taken from Spain by war.	<p>After the Florida cession (1819) and the Spanish American wars of independence (1810s-20s), Cuba and Puerto Rico remained Spain's only American colonies. The US took possession of Puerto Rico in 1898 as a result of the Spanish-American War.</p> <p>Puerto Ricans were granted US citizenship in 1917. Up through the 1950s, the US incrementally granted greater self-government to Puerto Rico while suppressing at times violent nationalist uprisings. Puerto Rico's 1952 constitution defines it as a "Free Associated State" in "compact" with the US, suggesting the same kind of relationship as that of the COFA nations (entries 56-58 of this table). However, the US still defines Puerto Rico as a US territory, which is not true of the COFA nations.</p>
<b>47</b>	Isle of Pines (Isla de la Juventud)	1898-1904	Colonized by US settlers. Ceded to Cuba.	After the Spanish-American War, over 2,000 US colonists settled on Isle of Pines on the premise that Spain had ceded the island to the US. However, in 1904 the US signed a treaty recognizing the island as part of Cuba. The US Senate did not ratify the treaty until 1925; in the interim, colonists lobbied the US for annexation, but without success.

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|----|------------------------|--------------|---|---|
| 48 | Hawai‘i                | 1898-present | Taken by a US settlers’ coup.   | <p>With US military support, Americans living in Hawai‘i overthrew the native monarchy in 1893 and founded a white-led Republic of Hawaii. The Republic sought annexation by the US; but disapproval in the US of the settlers’ coup prevented annexation until 1898, when the Spanish-American War turned the political tide in favor.</p> <p>Hawai‘i’s territory encompasses a 1,500-mile-long island chain, claimed from the time of the monarchy, although only the southeasternmost islands are inhabited. The US has designated the uninhabited islands and their surrounding waters as a massive national monument for environmental protection. Until 1959, Hawai‘i’s territory also included the Palmyra Atoll (entry 27 of this table).</p>   |
| 49 | Wake Island (Ānen-kio) | 1899-present | Claimed by US military. Occupied by Japan, then regained. Disputed with Marshall Islands. | <p>In 1899, in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, a US warship claimed this uninhabited atoll to use as a coaling or cable station. During the 20th century, Wake was used simultaneously as a commercial flight stopover and a US military base, with missile testing facilities during the Cold War. Japan seized Wake in 1941, surrendering it back to the US only with the end of World War II. During the Vietnam War, Wake was a processing center for Vietnamese refugees. The atoll still houses a military base, but the US has declared the surrounding waters a wildlife refuge.</p> <p>The Marshall Islands (entry 56 of this table) claim Wake as part of their territory, under the name Ānen-kio.</p>  |
| 50 | American Samoa         | 1899-present | Claimed by treaty with Britain and Germany.   | <p>In 1889, Britain, Germany, and the US formed a joint protectorate over the Samoan Islands, where all three nations had interests. Ten years later, Britain relinquished its claims, and Germany and the US took possession by treaty—Germany of the western islands (Western Samoa), the US of the eastern islands (American Samoa). The US added Swains Island (entry 30 of this table) to American Samoa’s territory in 1925.</p> <p>Western Samoa passed from Germany to New Zealand, then gained independence in 1962. American Samoa, by contrast, remains a US territory—the only inhabited US territory where natives have not been granted birthright citizenship. In 2016, some American Samoans sued unsuccessfully to be recognized as US citizens under the 14th Amendment. Other American Samoans fear that US citizenship would end ethnic privileges that sustain traditional Samoan culture.</p> |

51	Guantánamo Bay	1903-present	Leased from Cuba. Disputed, but retained by military occupation (and payments).	<p>Prior to 1898, the US tried several times to purchase Cuba from Spain but was rebuffed. Although the US occupied Cuba as a result of the Spanish-American War, it did not annex Cuba due to political opposition within the US. However, as a condition of independence, the US required Cuba to lease land to the US for naval stations. Cuba leased Guantánamo Bay to the US in 1903.</p> <p>Because the bay remains Cuban territory under the lease, the US does not classify Guantánamo as a US possession. Since the 1959 revolution, however, Cuba rejects the lease and views the US as illegally occupying the bay. By its terms, the lease can be ended only if both nations agree; thus, by sending payments, the US keeps the lease in force, even though Cuba refuses to cash those payments.</p>
52	Panama Canal Zone	1904-1979	Ceded by Panama (and paid for). Later ceded back to Panama.	<p>After Colombia rejected a treaty that would have let the US build a canal across the Darien Isthmus (then Colombian territory), the US backed a separatist revolt in the isthmus that led to the formation of independent Panama. Shortly thereafter, in 1904, the new Panamanian government granted the US rights of sovereignty within the Canal Zone in exchange for \$10 million.</p> <p>In the 1960s, Panama demanded a renegotiation. Consequently, the US ceded the Canal Zone back to Panama in 1979, although the US retained control of some facilities until 1999.</p>
53	Corn Islands	1914-1970	Leased from Nicaragua.	<p>In 1914, the US agreed to pay Nicaragua \$3 million for exclusive rights to build a transoceanic canal across Nicaragua, including a 99-year lease on the Corn Islands for canal security. The agreement granted the US sovereignty over the islands for the duration of the lease. The US built a lighthouse on the Corn Islands, but the canal was never developed. In 1970, to ease resentment in Nicaragua, the US consented to abrogate the 1914 agreement, and with it the lease.</p>
54	US Virgin Islands	1917-present	Purchased from Denmark.	<p>These islands became a Danish colony in the 1600s-1700s. The US tried to purchase the islands in 1867 and 1902, but both deals fell through. The US tried again during World War I, fearing that Germany might annex Denmark and thereby gain the islands to use as</p>

military bases. Denmark accepted the US’s offer of \$25 million; the US took possession in 1917.

US Virgin Islanders were granted US citizenship in 1927 and incrementally gained greater self-government in the decades that followed. In 2010, the US rejected a local constitution proposed by the US Virgin Islands because the document did not affirm US sovereignty.

**55** Ellice Islands 1939-1979 Disputed with Britain. Ceded to Tuvalu. In 1939, the US lodged a counterclaim, on unclear grounds, to four islands that Britain administered as part of its Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony. During World War II, the US occupied two of the islands, Funafuti and Nukufetau, as military bases, but relinquished them back to British control once the war ended. In 1979, Britain and the US both ceded their claims in the Ellice Islands to Tuvalu, a newly independent nation formed out of the British colony.

**56** Marshall Islands 1947-1986 } Taken from Japan by war. Retained by UN trust. Granted independence, with COFA. Spain and Germany competed with one another in the 1880s for sovereignty over the Marshall and Caroline Islands. Initially, Germany took the Marshalls while Spain kept the Carolines; but Spain sold the Carolines off to Germany as well after losing the Philippines and Guam to the US as a result of the Spanish-American War. In the aftermath of World War I, the Marshalls and Carolines passed from Germany to Japan; the US then seized these islands from Japan during World War II. In 1947, the United Nations assigned the islands to the US as part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). The US used the Marshalls to test nuclear weapons during the 1950s; as a result, native Marshallese were forced off five atolls, some of them after being exposed to fallout.

**57** Micronesia (Caroline Islands) 1947-1986

**58** Palau (westernmost Caroline Islands) 1947-1994 } In 1979-81, the US allowed the islands to organize themselves into three nations: the Republic of the Marshall Islands; the Federated States of Micronesia, encompassing most of the Caroline Islands; and the Republic of Palau, consisting of the westernmost Carolines. In 1986, each nation entered a Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the US, an arrangement that granted the nations sovereignty while giving the US ongoing military control of the islands and giving the islanders ongoing access to US government programs. Although signed in 1986, Palau’s COFA did not take effect until 1994 because of Palauan resistance to the US installing nuclear weapons there.

59	Northern Mariana Islands	1947-present	Taken from Japan by war. Retained by UN trust. Granted commonwealth status.	<p>The Mariana Islands were claimed by Spain starting in the 1500s. Following the Spanish-American War of 1898, the US took Guam, the southernmost of the Mariana Islands (entry 45 of this table), but left the remaining islands to Spain. Spain then sold the islands to Germany. The islands passed from Germany to Japan as a result of World War I; the US seized them from Japan during World War II. In 1947, the United Nations assigned the Northern Marianas to the US as part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). In the 1950s-60s, the Northern Marianas and Guam unsuccessfully petitioned the US and the UN for reunification.</p> <p>Although the rest of the TTPI negotiated for independence, the Northern Marianas voted in the 1970s to become a “self-governing commonwealth” of the US. The transition to commonwealth status was completed in 1986, when Northern Mariana Islanders received US citizenship.</p>
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### Notes

**Dating:** In this table, treaties are usually dated from their signing, not from their ratification, which may have followed years later. Claims made under the Guano Islands Act are dated not from when the entrepreneur claimed possession but from when the State Department certified the claim; as a result, the table omits a number of islands that entrepreneurs claimed for the United States but that the US government did not subsequently certify.

**Colonies:** For the purpose of inclusion in this table, a particular case of emigration out of the United States is classified as a US “colony” if the initiative had US government sponsorship (as in the cases of Liberia and Île-à-Vache) or if the emigrants regarded the settlement site as being already a US possession (as in the case of Isle of Pines). Filibusters that were repudiated by the US government (such as took place in Baja California and Nicaragua) are not included in this table.



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