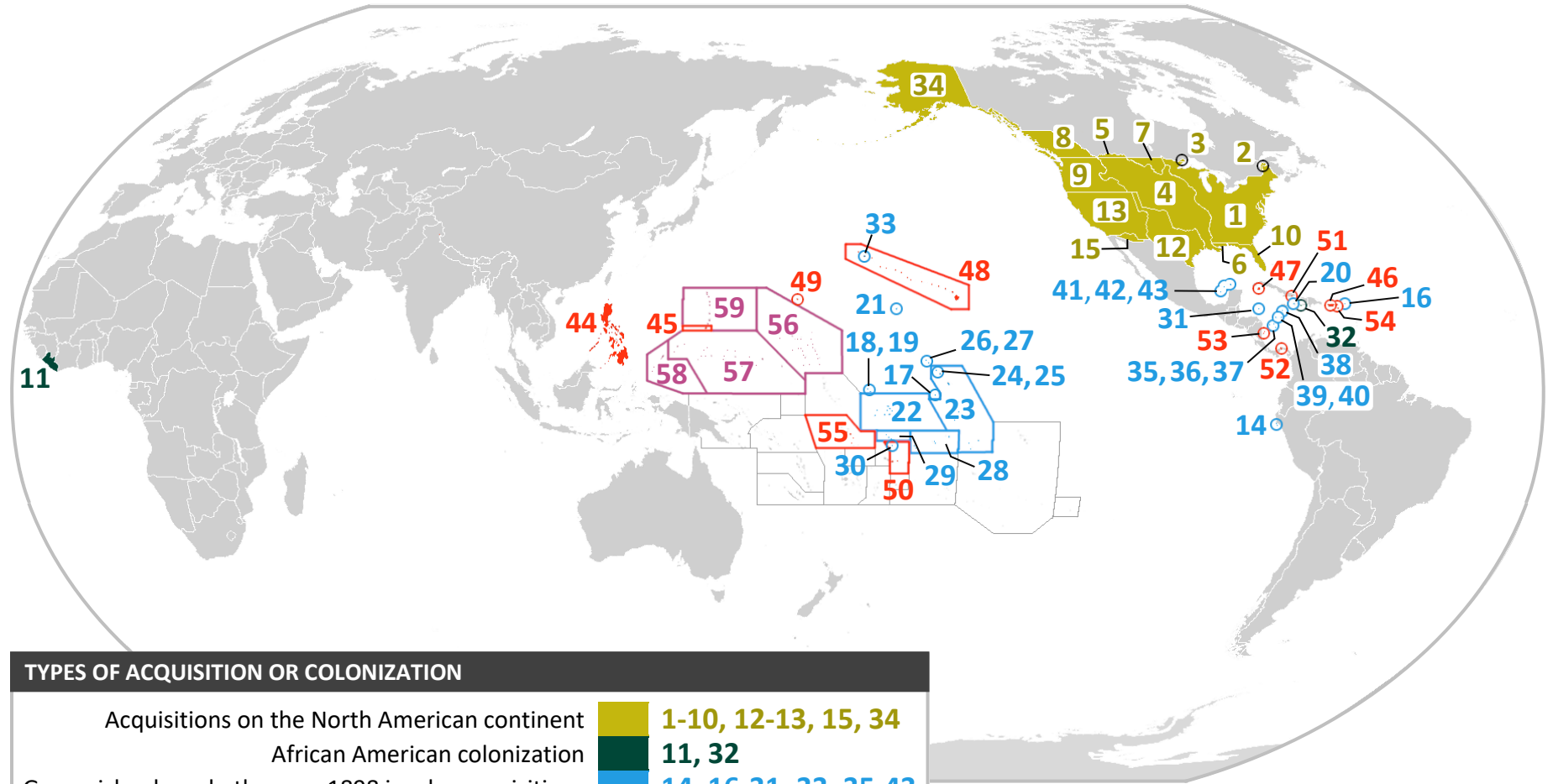


The United States – historical

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
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Guano islands and other pre-1898 insular acquisitions	14, 16-31, 33, 35-43
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Acquisitions following World War II	56-59

Numbers correspond to entries on the accompanying chronological list of territories.



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	TERRITORY	TIME SPAN
1	Original US territory	1783-present
2	Halifax Road corridor	1783-1842
3	Kam–Dog–Maligne Route sector	1783-1842
4	Louisiana Purchase	1803-present
5	Northern Mississippi watershed	1803-1818
6	West Florida	1810-present
7	Red River basin	1818-present
8	Northern Oregon Country	1818-1846
9	Southern Oregon Country	1818-present
10	East Florida	1819-present
11	Liberia	1822-1854
12	Texas	1845-present
13	Mexican Cession	1848-present
14	Lobos Islands	1852
15	Gadsen Purchase	1853-present
16	Sombrero Island	1856-1869
17	Jarvis Island	1856-present
18	Baker Island	1856-present
19	Howland Island	1858-present
20	Navassa Island	1858-present
21	Johnston Atoll	1859-present
22	Phoenix Islands	1859-1979
23	Line Islands, easternmost	1859-1979
24	Tabuaeran (Fanning Island)	1860-1888
25	Teraina (Washington Island)	1860-1889
26	Kingman Reef	1860-present
27	Palmyra Atoll	1860-present
28	Northern Cook Islands	1860-1980
29	Tokelau Islands	1860-1980
30	Swains Island (Olohega)	1860-present

	TERRITORY	TIME SPAN
31	Swan Islands	1862-1972
32	Île-à-Vache	1863-1864
33	Midway Atoll	1867-present
34	Alaska	1867-present
35	Serrana Bank	1868-1972
36	Quita Sueño Bank	1869-1972
37	Roncador Bank	1869-1972
38	Pedro Cays	1869-1878
39	Bajo Nuevo Bank (Petrel Island)	1869-present
40	Serranilla Bank	1880-present
41	Arenas Key	1879-1894
42	Western Triangle Island	1880-1894
43	Scorpion Reef	1884-1894
44	Philippines	1898-1946
45	Guam	1898-present
46	Puerto Rico	1898-present
47	Isle of Pines (Isla de la Juventud)	1898-1904
48	Hawai‘i	1898-present
49	Wake Island (Ānen-kio)	1899-present
50	American Samoa	1899-present
51	Guantánamo Bay	1903-present
52	Panama Canal Zone	1904-1979
53	Corn Islands	1914-1970
54	US Virgin Islands	1917-present
55	Ellice Islands	1939-1979
56	Marshall Islands	1947-1986
57	Micronesia (Caroline Islands)	1947-1986
58	Palau (westernmost Caroline Islands)	1947-1994
59	Northern Mariana Islands	1947-present

■ *Acquisitions on the North American continent*

When the United States won independence from the British empire in 1783, the new nation negotiated with Britain and Spain to establish the Mississippi River as its western border. By the 1830s, the US had subjugated most indigenous nations east of the river and relocated them to lands west of it. During the same period, the US pushed its borders farther west and south—via purchase, negotiation, or war with Britain, France, Spain, and Mexico—until, by the time of the Civil War, the US claimed all of the territory occupied by the 48 contiguous states today. Prior to the Civil War, the US also tried to acquire Quebec and what are now the northern states of Mexico; some US officials aspired further to annex British Columbia and all of Mexico.

The United States made its final acquisition in continental North America shortly after the Civil War, when it purchased Alaska from the Russian empire. In the late 1800s, the US solidified control of its western continental territories by waging war against resisting indigenous nations and by establishing political dominance over other settlers in the region, notably Mexicans and Mormons.

■ *African American colonization*

During the 1800s, some African Americans abandoned the United States for the British dominions of Canada and the West Indies. Thousands of others emigrated to colonies funded by the US government, successfully in Liberia (in western Africa), unsuccessfully on Île-à-Vache (off the coast of Haiti). US officials made abortive plans for an additional colony in what is now Panama. Because whites who supported colonization aimed to *remove* free blacks from the nation, the US did not plan to annex any of these colonies. Liberia became an independent nation in the 1840s.

■ *Guano islands and other pre-1898 insular acquisitions*

During the 1850s-80s, the United States claimed over 40 islands in the Pacific and the Caribbean for the purpose of mining guano, which was in high demand for fertilizer. In addition, the US claimed Midway Atoll for a mid-ocean coaling station to support military and commercial ventures to Asia. In the Caribbean, the US tried, but failed, to purchase Cuba from Spain and the Danish West Indies from Denmark. During the 1880s-90s, the US established a joint protectorate with Britain and Germany over Samoa, and a US military force helped American settlers overthrow the indigenous monarchy in Hawai‘i.

■ *Acquisitions following the Spanish-American War*

In 1898, the United States took the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico from Spain by war; the US occupied Cuba as well but then granted it independence. Within a year of the Spanish-American War, the US had also annexed Wake Island, Hawai‘i, and eastern Samoa. During World War I, the US finally succeeded in purchasing the Danish West Indies, which became the US Virgin Islands. A newly devised legal distinction between “incorporated” and “unincorporated” territories allowed the US to annex these new possessions without having to extend full constitutional rights to the native inhabitants. The US put down revolts in Puerto Rico and, most seriously, the Philippines.

In the early 20th century, the US backed a separatist rebellion in Colombian-held Panama in order to obtain the Canal Zone from the separatist government. Subsequently, the US used some of its Caribbean guano islands for lighthouses to guide canal traffic. The US also reasserted several dormant guano island claims for the purpose of expanding its military presence in the Pacific, where the US competed with the British, German, and later Japanese empires.

■ *Acquisitions—and decolonization—following World War II*

Very soon after World War II, the United States granted independence to the Philippines, part of an emerging global trend toward decolonization. In the wake of the Japanese empire’s collapse, the United Nations assigned the Mariana, Marshall, and Caroline Islands (former Japanese possessions) to the US as a trust territory, to be guided to self-government. During the Cold War, the US used the trust territory and other Pacific possessions for military purposes, including nuclear weapons tests. Consequently, indigenous Marshallese were forced off five atolls, some of them after being exposed to fallout.

In the 1970s, the US ceded many—but not all—of its island claims in the Pacific and the Caribbean to smaller nations with counterclaims; also in this period, the US ceded the Canal Zone back to Panama. In the 1980s, the Marianas became a “self-governing commonwealth” of the US, while the Marshalls and Carolines negotiated compacts of “free association” with the US. The terms “commonwealth” and “free association” echo language used in connection with the decolonizing of former British possessions.



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