

# American Independence Day

The Fourth of July is one of America's biggest holidays, with celebrations including fireworks and parades across the USA.



**In 1492, Christopher Columbus** landed in the Caribbean, unlocking what Europeans quickly came to call the **'New World'**. Columbus 'found' a land with around two million inhabitants. He thought he had found a new route to the East, so he mistakenly called these people 'Indians'. Within a hundred years, Europeans were trying to settle in the Americas. With Spanish and Portuguese explorers in the south, **English explorers focused on North America.**



Relations between the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas and the Europeans were also shaped by the fierce competition among **European nations for wealth and power.**

As Europeans took control of more and more of the Americas, millions of **Indigenous People were killed.** Countless others were pushed into the interior of both continents. Still others were **forced into slavery.**

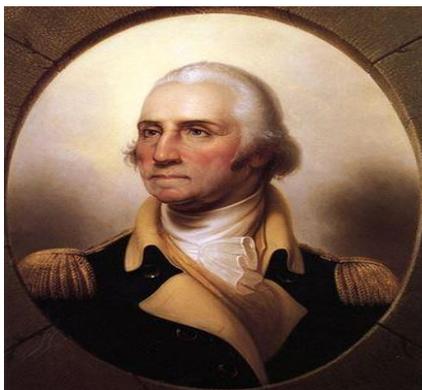


By the 1760s, the thirteen British colonies contained 2.5 million people along the Atlantic Coast east of the Appalachian Mountains. After defeating France, the British government imposed a series of taxes, including the **Stamp Act of 1765**, rejecting the colonists' constitutional argument that new taxes needed their approval. **Resistance to these taxes**, especially the **Boston Tea Party in 1773**, led to Parliament issuing punitive laws designed to end self-government in Massachusetts.



### Boston Tea Party

Armed conflict began in 1775. **In 1776**, in Philadelphia, the Second Continental Congress **declared the independence of the colonies as the United States**. Led by General George Washington, it won the Revolutionary War.



George Washington

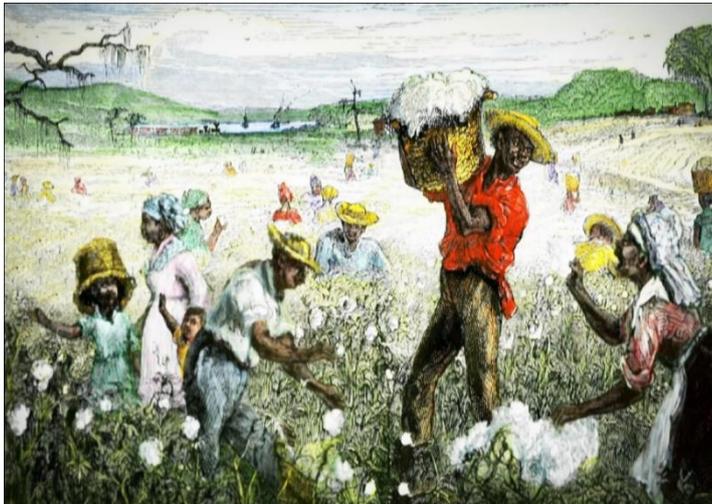
Ist President of USA



The Declaration

With **Washington as the first president**, a strong central government was created. Purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803 doubled the size of the United States. **A second and final war with Britain was fought in 1812, which solidified national pride.**

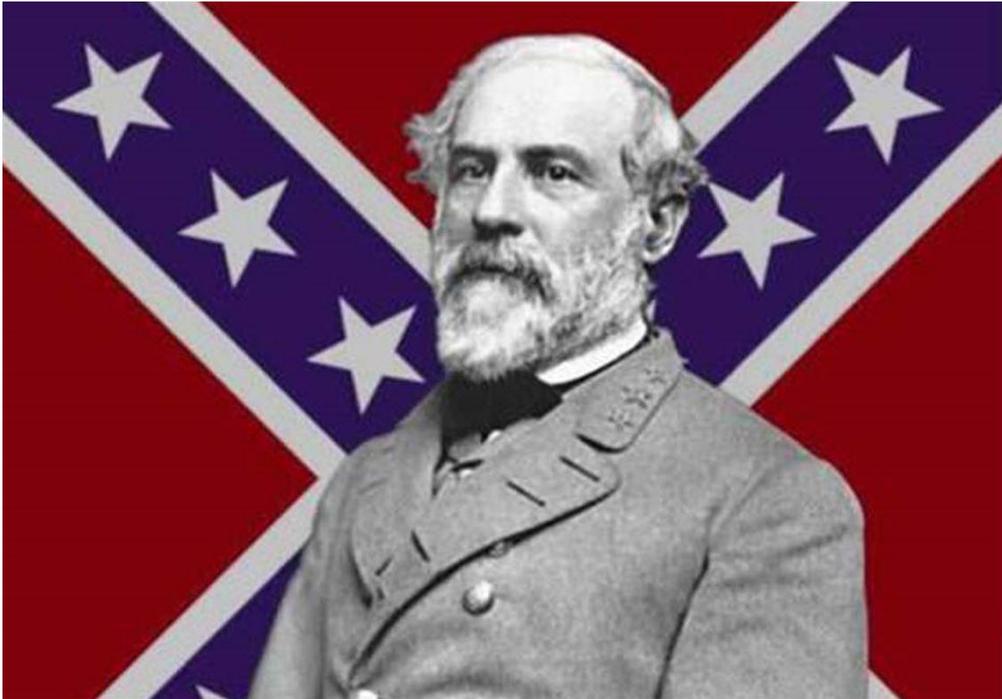
**The expansion of slavery was increasingly controversial and fuelled political and constitutional battles, which were resolved by compromises. Slavery was abolished in all states north of the Mason-Dixon line by 1804, but the South continued to profit from the institution, mostly from the production of cotton.**



Republican **Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860** on a platform of **halting the expansion of slavery.**



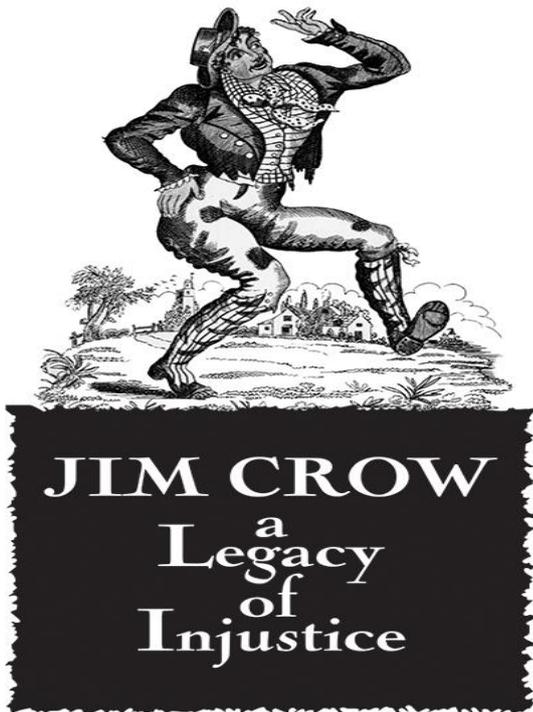
**Abraham Lincoln**



Robert E Lee

Seven Southern slave states rebelled and created the foundation of the **Confederacy**. Its attack of Fort Sumter against the Union forces there in **1861 started the Civil War**. Defeat of the Confederates in 1865 led to the impoverishment of the South and the **abolition of slavery**.

In the Reconstruction era following the war, **legal and voting rights were extended to freed slaves**. The national government emerged much stronger, and because of the **Fourteenth Amendment** in 1868, it gained explicit duty to protect **individual rights**.



However, when **white Democrats regained their power in the South in 1877**, often by paramilitary suppression of voting, they passed

Jim Crow laws to **maintain white supremacy**, as well as

new disenfranchising state constitutions that **prevented most African Americans and many Poor Whites from voting.**

This continued until the gains of the civil rights movement in the 1960s and the passage of federal legislation to **enforce uniform constitutional rights for all citizens.**

