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REFERENCE NOTES

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United We Stand: America's Territories

In 1776 thirteen colonies incited an act of revolution eventually winning their freedoms and uniting to become thirteen states standing to form the United States. In the years that followed with an instilled sense of Manifest Destiny, the United States acquired territories from France, Spain, and others which allowed for the addition of new territories. During the hundred and sixty years that followed thirty-seven other states formed from territories and joined the United States. To this date, the United State holds territories that have no representation in Congress but are bound by US law. Through a mixture of chance, political opportunity, necessity, and war the U.S. gained territories. Where are our current territories at on the road to statehood?

In 1959, a territory in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Hawaii, became the 50th state. In 1946 the US granted independence to the Philippines. Territories looking for statehood or independence will both have to meet requirements. The applicant must be a territory of the US and have a population of sixty thousand or

higher for statehood. In both cases, the population then takes a vote to petition for either statehood or to form a commonwealth which leads to independence. In both situations, they will need to submit a state constitution that reflects the US constitution and its laws. After review, it will need to be voted on by Congress and signed by the president.

How existing states came into the union, unfortunately, does not paint a clear picture about the process. The original thirteen colonies became states at the end of the Revolutionary War while Vermont and Texas were independent republics that joined. Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi came about piecemeal through a combination of purchases from Spain. In the annexation of territory in the Gulf Coast, there was a show of U.S. military force by sending the navy into the Gulf of Mexico. Other acquisitions were of the Louisiana Purchase and a result of the Spanish American War. Some territory was even acquired through dishonest means, for example, Mobile was acquired years later. It was annexed by making claim

it was part the Louisiana Purchase. In many cases, statehood came at the behest of political cohesion. In 1820 the Missouri territory moved for statehood with a compromise in which Missouri and Maine both became states reflecting social struggles at the time.

The existing US territories are a result of wars and political doctrine extending back to the Monroe Doctrine and the Spanish American War. Established by President James Monroe in 1823 the doctrine proclaimed that European powers couldn't establish new colonies or interfere with new countries in the Americas. This doctrine was ultimately tested in 1898 as the USS Maine mysteriously sank during the Cuban War of Independence from Spain. As a result, the US entered what became the Spanish-American War supporting Cuba. At the end of the war, we took control of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam and for a short time, Cuba. Other acquired territories included the Carolines, Marshall, and the Mariana Islands.

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Map of the United States in the 1600s (sonofthesouth.net)



Colonization of the Americas: 1750



1903 Map of Land Gained through the Louisiana Purchase (Digital Public Library of America)

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In the post-WWII era, the United States and most European countries have backed away from foreign territories. The United States recognized its territories in the Philippines as the independent Republic of the Philippines on July 4th, 1946. In our modern era, Guam sits as our major populated territory in the Pacific. The territories of American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands each reflect a population that is a third of that of

claim to territories in the Caribbean including Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. While Puerto Rico was acquired as a part of the territory gained during the Spanish American War, the US Virgin Islands, previously the Danish West Indies was purchased in 1916.

The territories that have become states did so over the course of a hundred and sixty years. Currently, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, and Washington DC have voted on ref-

erendums to petition for statehood. On a number of occasions, Guam has submitted petition for independence like the Philippines but has had little success. Currently, the territories of American Samoa and the Marianas lack sufficient population for statehood. For the time being their fate as future states will be left to chance, political opportunity, necessity or war.

America's Territories Pathfinder

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New American Atlas (1825)