

UNEVEN POPULATION DISTRIBUTION IN THE USA

Overall, the USA has a low average population density of 33 persons per square kilometre. The figure varies greatly from place to place within the USA, however. High densities are found along the eastern coast, especially in the cities of New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore. This is, in part, a legacy of the way Europeans founded new settlements along the eastern seaboard in the 1600s and 1700s. Subsequently, economic activity has remained focused on the eastern coastline and the opportunities for trade it brings.

Over time, early European settlers moved westwards, often displacing the **indigenous populations** of each territory they entered. Large clusters of population developed historically around the Great Lakes in cities such as Detroit and Chicago. However, much of the interior of the USA has a low density of fewer than 20 people per square kilometre. In many areas west of the Rocky Mountains the figure is less than one person per square kilometre. This reflects the

aridity of the Western Desert, including large parts of Texas, New Mexico, Nevada and Arizona. In recent decades, some cities in this region, such as Phoenix, have gained population thanks to irrigation and water transfer schemes. Much of the area remains devoid of settlement and population though.

Finally, the west coast – from San Diego as far north as Seattle – is more densely populated, especially the conurbations surrounding the major cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco. Many migrants were attracted here on account of its hot, dry climate and the opportunities provided by the Pacific coastline for trade with Asia. Los Angeles has become a global entertainment industry hub, which is home to Hollywood. The USA is sometimes said to display a ‘binary’ settlement pattern: the world cities of New York and Los Angeles are equally powerful magnets for migrants and investors alike.

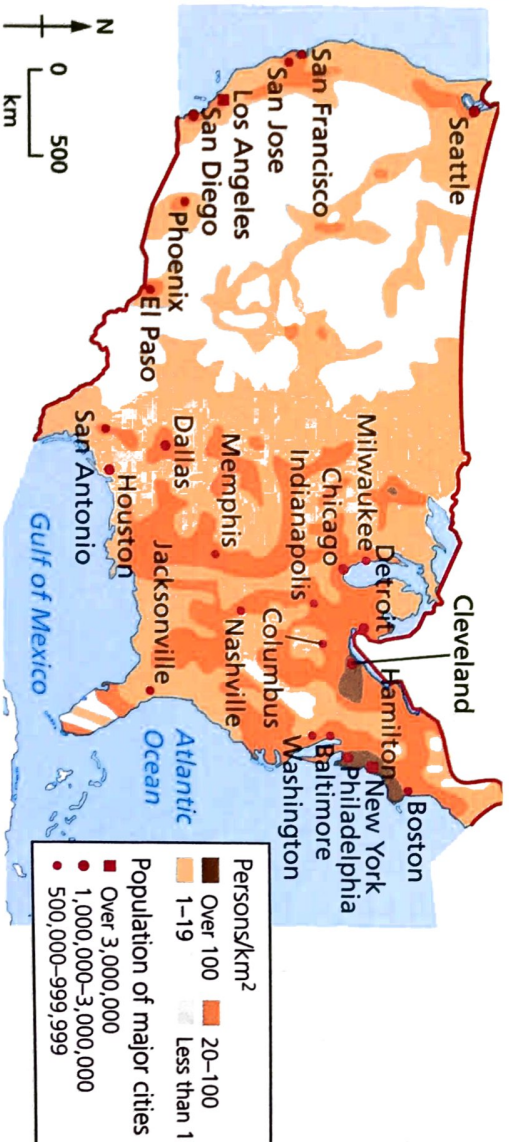


Figure 1.8 The uneven population distribution of the USA

Keyword definition
Indigenous population An ethnic group that has occupied the place where it lives and calls home for hundreds or thousands of years without interruption.