



# A Level History

## Summer Bridging Work



# In search of the American Dream 1917-1996: A thematic study

Royal Russell History Department preparation for A-  
Level summer work.

Name.....

## **Introduction to Paper 1**

This option comprises a study of the dramatic political, economic and social transformation of the USA in the twentieth century, an era which saw the USA challenged by the consequences of political, economic and social inequalities at home while maintaining its position as a world superpower.

In 1917, the USA entered the First World War as the fastest growing economy in the world and with the potential to become a leading world power. By the end of 1918, America had ended the war as the world's 'top nation'. Until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1941, the USA was reluctant to become the world's policeman — the policy of isolationism — but was more willing to encourage the spread of its political, economic and cultural values: democracy, capitalism and mass popular entertainment. After 1945, as the USA and the USSR pursued the Cold War, the USA aggressively promoted these values as one of the world's two superpowers. The USA was, and is, a country of contradictions. Radical revolutionaries had fought for independence from Britain in the 1770s but conservative conformity was the prevailing political attitude. The 'American Dream' was of security and prosperity but equality of opportunity often meant 'rugged individualism': sorting out one's own problems. Meanwhile ethnic minorities, women, the poor, social minorities and radicals often struggled to be heard in the 'land of the free'. The history of the USA in the twentieth century can be seen as the history of ordinary Americans trying to come to terms with these contradictions.

In the 1920s, America experienced both 'boom' and 'bust'. Non-interventionist Republican presidents allowed the economy to expand with little regulation. Many Americans flourished but few farmers, African Americans and immigrants prospered. After the Wall Street Crash in 1929, most Americans were hit by a decade of the Great Depression and those who were already poor suffered most. The majority of voters put their trust in President Roosevelt, who promised a New Deal to save the country, but it was probably his decision to enter the Second World War that bailed America out.

Post-1945 America experienced an unparalleled prosperity which saw the creation of an affluent white middle-class. In the 1960s, this led to resentment from those who were excluded — the search for civil rights — and, perhaps most surprisingly, backlash from the youth who had benefited most: counter-culture. President Johnson's 'Great Society' programme did try to help the poor but he was undermined by the disaster that was the Vietnam War.

Many Americans hoped that the 1970s would bring greater stability. However, despite continued superpower status and the advance of American popular culture, it only brought further challenges. Conservative America hoped that President Nixon would bring stability, but he resigned amid scandal and corruption. Neither Republican nor Democrat presidents were able to deal effectively with either social tensions or economic downturn.

In the next decade the tensions did not go away, but 1980 ushered in 12 years of more confident Republican rule. Ronald Reagan's presidency (1980–88) was just as controversial as Margaret Thatcher's in Britain but President Clinton's first term in office (1992–96) was heavily influenced by its political and economic conservatism. However, social and cultural values continued to polarise even more. Even today, 'Obama-care' may have introduced health insurance for more Americans than ever before, but ultra-conservative republicanism is also thriving.

You will study FOUR themes and one interpretation.

Themes
Theme 1: The changing political environment, 1917–80
Theme 2: The quest for civil rights, 1917–80
Theme 3: Society and culture in change, 1917–80
Theme 4: The changing quality of life, 1917–80
The historical interpretations focus is: What impact did the Reagan presidency (1981–89) have on the USA in the years 1981–96?

### **Theme 1: The changing political environment, 1917–80**

In studying Theme 1 students will need to understand the changing political climate from US entry into the First World War to Reagan's election. Detailed knowledge of individual presidential policies is not required but students should have an understanding of general policy initiatives undertaken by presidents and their underlying political influences. Students should be aware of the changing styles of presidential leadership across the period. They should also understand the effect that American involvement in war had on the general political environment and presidential government.

### **Theme 2: The quest for civil rights, 1917–80**

In studying Theme 2 students will consider the struggle for minority rights in the years 1917–80, with particular reference to African-American civil rights. Students should understand the political, social and economic situation for African Americans across the period. They should be aware of the changing nature and pattern of campaigning and be able to identify relevant examples. Students should have knowledge of major federal civil rights legislation and an understanding of their impact, but do not need detailed knowledge of their passage or specific clauses. They should be aware of the influence of the African- American struggle on the search for non-African-American minority rights, but also understand the distinct reasons for campaigning by other minorities.

### **Theme 3: Society and culture in change, 1917–80**

In studying Theme 3 students will study selected aspects of society and culture which were both transformed and transforming in the years 1917–80. Students should also be aware that experiences of women and migrants were part of the quest for rights and freedoms studied in Theme 2. Students should understand the patterns of change across the period and that women had differing experiences. They should be aware of both the extent to which the USA was a migrant nation and the diversity of the immigrant experience. Students should have an understanding of the extent to which popular culture and broadcast news both reflected and influenced society, and be able to identify relevant examples.

### **Theme 4: The changing quality of life, 1917–80**

In studying Theme 4 students will consider the extent to which the quality of life in the USA in the years 1917–80 was affected by the economic environment and increasing aspiration. Detailed knowledge of economic policies and measures are not required but students should be aware of the patterns of economic change and their effects on living standards. They

should also be aware of the benefits and gains across the period and that different social groups had differing experiences. Students should have an understanding of the extent to which developments in leisure and travel affected the quality of life and identify relevant examples.

**Historical interpretations: What impact did the Reagan presidency (1981–89) have on the USA in the years 1981–96?**

This topic focuses on the debate concerning the nature and effect of Ronald Reagan's presidency from 1980 to 1988, and the consequences of his two terms in office to the presidential election of 1992. Students will need to know the main features of Reaganomics and his aims to reduce the role of federal government. They will need to be aware of his conservative social values and the influence of the Religious Right in the 1980s. Students will need to consider the extent to which Reagan's economic policies were successfully implemented and the extent to which economic problems were overcome. They should also be aware of Reagan's economic legacy in the years to 1996. Students will need to consider the extent and impact of cutbacks in federal government and the extent and effectiveness of deregulation policies. Students should also consider the extent to which Reagan's social values influenced social change and affected the advancement of women and of African Americans and other minority groups. They should understand the extent to which Reagan's policies affected the both the nature of US electoral politics and the public perception of the role of the President up to 1996. Students should understand the nature of the debate on the extent to which Reagan's presidency changed US politics. They should be aware of the impact of the 'Iran-Contra affair' on attitudes towards the Reagan presidency. Students should be aware of the impact of the Reagan legacy on the period 1989–96 with regard to continuity and change in policies and general trends.

## **The USA pre 1900**

The History of the USA is relatively recent. Following their independence from Great Britain in 1783, Americans began to settle into their new continent with amazing speed. By the mid nineteenth century they had gained all land south of Canada and north of Mexico between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This was achieved mainly through purchase and warfare. The land mass was 3,022,000 square miles, in contrast with 94,525 square miles of the UK. It was settled so quickly that by 1890 the Census declared there was no longer any underdeveloped territory available for settlement.

The entire history of the USA until 1920 had happened in a space of 140 years. There was little time for development of tradition as there had been in Europe. The individual was thought to be of vast importance and the continent of America was there to be settled quickly. The fact that it was settled so quickly and the country developed so rapidly led many people to believe in the 'American Dream'; that with hard work and initiative one could achieve anything without expecting much support from the government.

The USA was a land rich in natural resources, fertile for crops and populated by an energetic, dynamic people who were mainly descended from immigrants. The 19C had seen the biggest migration in history with millions leaving the old world of Europe and Asia and headed to America to find work, land and freedom from persecution. The USA was originally made up of immigrants who had arrived not willingly but often forcibly as slaves from Africa. The Civil war had torn the union apart in the years 1861-5. It had ended slavery but not the persecution of African Americans. The North had grown increasingly wealthy from industrial development, while the south had remained predominantly rural. The West was populated in mythology by pioneers who had tamed a wilderness largely by their own efforts. It had developed as a region of fierce independence with little toleration of government interference.

The USA had an economic structure in which people were free to make money with very little government interference. Industries grew wealthy because of three main factors:

- The relative abundance and cheapness of natural resources
- The availability of cheap, often immigrant labour
- The overwhelming demand in a continent developing so quickly.

Huge industrial concerns grew up in the great cities; but small scale industry also thrived.

**Complete the following three tasks using the information on the USA pre 1900.**  
**Do the tasks in the booklet.**

**Task 1**

True or false – is the following information true or false? If false please correct it.

Information	True/false
America gained independence from Britain in 1873	
America was able to gain empire quickly	
America was bigger the Great Britain	
By 1890 there was no land available for settlement	
American people did not expect or want government intervention	
The American dream was about hard work and initiative	
America was mainly made of immigrants	
The Civil War lasted from 1860-64	
The Civil War ended slavery in America and persecution of blacks	
Taxes were kept low to encourage industry	

**Task 2 - define the following key words**

Word	Meaning
Census	
Government intervention	
American Dream	
Civil War	
Slavery	
Immigrant	
Industrial	
Rural	
persecution	

**Task 3 - Below is an extract describing America pre 1900 however there are some mistakes. Read through, find the errors and correct them.**

America is a relatively new country. They had been part of the British Empire and used for transportation but in 1783 they gained independence. By the 1850s they had taken over all of Canada and Mexico by buying them and through war. America soon became an attractive country with many people wanting to move there; the census of 1790 stated that there was no more room for settlement and immigration was decreased. Even so lots of people still wanted to move there because of the American Dream – the idea that if you worked hard and took matters into your own hands the government would support you and would give you advice. The government also believed in low taxes for business owners. Another reason to move to America in the 1900s was because of the end of the Civil War, The majority of Americans were pleased that in 1865 slavery was abolished and that America was now not a racist country. A good example of this was that the KKK died down. There were three reasons for American economic prosperity. Firstly the fact the America had few natural resources meant that initiative was needed to create good and there were lots of opportunities. Secondly the amount of immigrants led to cheap labour and lastly the demand for goods.

Correct the mistakes made.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)



## The Political System of the USA

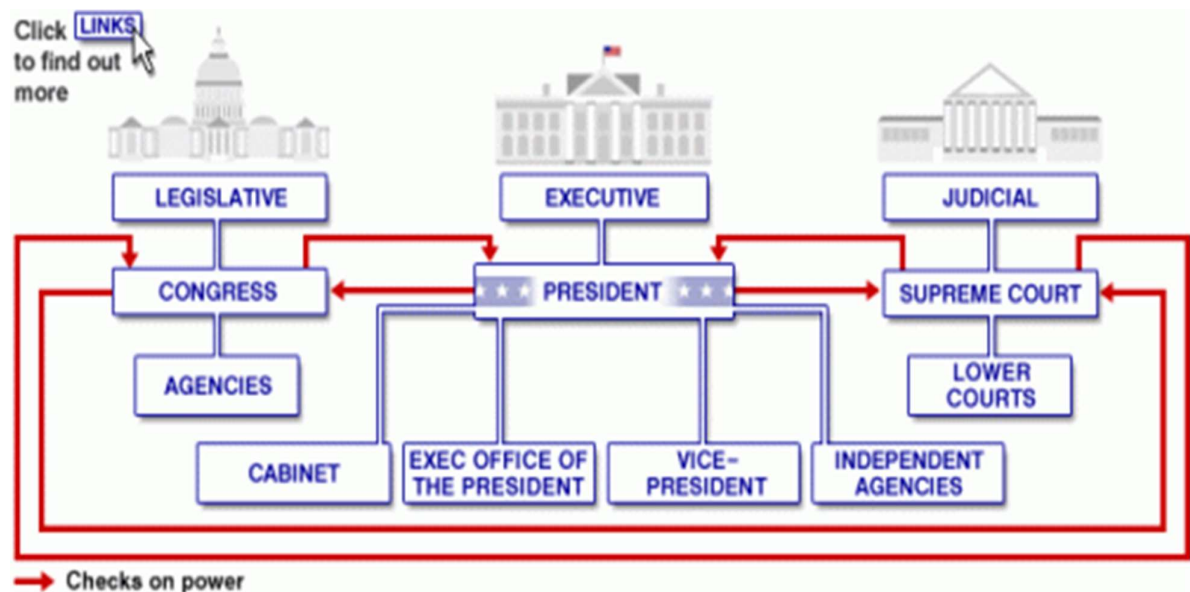
**Task 4** - For this task you will need a computer with internet access.

The government of the USA is split into three sections.

1. **Legislature** – The group of people that make the laws and change existing laws
2. **Executive** - The branch in charge of enforcing the laws
3. **Supreme Court** - Responsible for interpreting the laws and deciding if they are fair

Please go to the following website address

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/americas/04/us\\_election/govt\\_system/html/introduction.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/americas/04/us_election/govt_system/html/introduction.stm)



Use the above diagram on the BBC website.

Click on the links for each section and answer the following questions.

You could also watch this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6E9WU9TGrec&list=PL8dPuuaLjXtMwmepBjTSG593eG7ObzO7s>

1. Which sections of the US government come under the control of the legislative branch?

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2. What are the responsibilities of these two agencies?  
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3. In addition to leading the Executive branch of government what other responsibilities does the President have?  
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4. How many different sections does the President have direct control over?  
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5. Define and give two examples of external agencies  
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6. What is the Supreme Court? How is it organised?  
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7. Why are there lower courts as well as the Supreme Court?  
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**Task 5 -** Write definitions of the following key words. Once you have completed that put them into the correct spaces on the information on p11&12 (you will not need all the words from the key terms table)

Key terms

Key term	Definition
Bicameral	
Capitalism	
Communism	
Congress	
Constitution	
Democrat	
Federalism	
House of Representative	
Judiciary	
Left Wing	
Republican	
Right wing	
Socialism	
Supreme Court	
Trades Unions	
Veto	

..... Wing

In politics you can be either left wing, right wing or in the middle. People on this 'wing' believe in greater equality. They think that people should pay high taxes so that money can be shared more equally, they think workers deserve good rights and fair treatment and they are usually (although not always) anti-war. They also believe that large industries (like electricity or the railways should be owned by the government). People on this wing who are moderate are called 'socialists'. People who believe very, very strongly in this wing are called 'Communists' or 'Marxists'.

This is a power held by the US President. The President can use this power to block any laws or proposals made by congress that he doesn't like. It is only used in exceptional circumstances though.

This is a political ideology. It is currently the ideology that is in existence in the UK and the USA. It advocates that people should be free to make money, and that companies should be protected by the government and the rule of law. It gives people great freedom, but also, if unchecked, can lead to great inequality.

A country that has a federal system has power divided between government and the regions. For example, there would be one national government that makes laws for the entire country, and separate regional parliaments that make laws for the different regions.

This is the belief in complete equality. People who hold this belief believe that rich people should have their money confiscated, that it should be illegal to own businesses or private property and that the working classes should be in charge of the country. This is an extreme left wing belief.

This is one of the main political parties of the USA. This party was traditionally the more 'left wing' and 'liberal' of the two parties.

This is a fancy word to describe those who make the laws in a country. The Judges, the lawyers and the justice system.

This is the most important arm of the judiciary in the USA. The Court is made up of nine senior judges, appointed by the President, who serve for life. They have the power to decide whether or not laws are constitutional. If the court decides that a law is unconstitutional, then the law cannot be enacted.

This is the US equivalent of the British Parliament. They debate and approve new laws.

This one of the main political parties in the USA. This party was traditionally the party of big business and Western farmers. This party was the party of Abraham Lincoln, so was traditionally associated with anti-slavery and so most black people usually voted for this party. This changed between the 1930s and 1960s though as black people began supporting the Democratic party Southern whites supported the Republicans.

#### ..... Wing

In politics you can be either left wing right wing or in the middle. People on this 'wing' believe in inequality. They think that people should be free to make lots of money and if people are unsuccessful then it is their own fault. For this reason they do not like high taxes. People on this wing are also very patriotic and believe in a strong country and army. They also hate communists and dislike socialists. People who are moderate on this wing are called 'nationalists'. People who believe in these things very, very strongly are called 'fascists'.

**America quick quiz:**

- 1. The capital of America is**  
New York                                  Washington                                  New Orleans
- 2. How many original English colonies were established?**  
11                                  12                                  13
- 3. The currency in America is**  
The dollar                                  the pound                                  the euro
- 4. Who was president of America during the great depression of 1929 – 1933?**  
Herbert Hoover                          Franklin Roosevelt                          Adolf Hitler
- 5. What natural resources did America have in the 19C?**  
Coal and gold                          Coal and oil                                  Oil and gold
- 6. What was prohibition?**  
Making alcohol highly taxed                  removing taxes from alcohol                  making alcohol illegal?
- 7. What percentage of alcohol did a drink have to contain for it to be defined as alcohol after prohibition?**  
1.0%                                  0.25%                                  0.5%
- 8. The American Civil War made what illegal?**  
Alcohol                                  drugs                                  slavery
- 9. How many branches of the government in the USA are there?**  
1                                  2                                  3
- 10. What is the land mass of the USA**  
2,022,000                                  3,022,000                                  4,022,0000

## Enrichment List

### Online videos:

#### Crash Course US History

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6E9WU9TGrec&list=PL8dPuuaLjXtMwmepBjTSG593eG7ObzO7s>

Videos #30 - #45 are relevant for our course. He can be a 'little' annoying but he knows his stuff!

#### Eyes on the Prize

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ts10IVzUDVw&list=PLOwK3r1sMvSZVth7XGlcplLSjS3tAp90T>

Excellent documentary about the civil rights movement.

#### The Century: America's Time

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvGgZ5v2o\\_N8dDogxreL2-NbnfKHgHxqY](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvGgZ5v2o_N8dDogxreL2-NbnfKHgHxqY)

A series of programmes about the USA over the 20th century.

#### Reagan PBS documentary Part 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aO9PvQ3tFdg>

First part of a lengthy but comprehensive documentary about Reagan – helpful for the interpretations section of the course.

### Reading

#### **Non-fiction**

- American Caesars: Lives of the US Presidents, from Franklin D. Roosevelt to George W. Bush by Nigel Hamilton
- One Summer: America, 1927 by Bill Bryson
- The Modern American Presidency by Lewis L. Gould

#### **Fiction**

- Catch 22 by Joseph Heller
- Gone with the Wind by Margaret Mitchell
- My Antonia by Willa Cather
- The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger
- The Color Purple by Alice Walker
- The Crucible/All My Sons/A View from the Bridge by Arthur Miller (Plays)
- The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck
- The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

## **Films**

*Films set in nineteenth-century America:*

- 12 Years a Slave (2013)
- Cold Mountain (2003)
- Gangs of New York (2002)
- Lincoln (2012)
- Little Women (1994)
- To Kill a Mockingbird

*Films set in the twentieth-century America:*

- All the President's Men (2013)
- Argo (2012)
- Fog of War (2003)
- Forest Gump (1994)
- Frost/Nixon (2008)
- Hidden Figures
- Jackie (2016)
- Malcolm X (1992)
- Milk (2008)
- Mississippi Burning (1988)
- Of Mice and Men (1992)
- Pearl Harbor (2001)
- Selma (2014)
- Some Like it Hot (1959)
- Stonewall (2015)
- The Butler (2013)
- The Great Gatsby (2013)
- The Help (2011)

## **Online museums**

<https://americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/online>

<http://www.fdrlibraryvirtualtour.org/index.asp>

<https://www.nasa.gov>

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/collection>

<https://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions>

<https://www.womenshistory.org/womens-history/online-exhibits>

**Extension Task: write a review about a book/film/museum**