

Paper 2, Option 2H.1: The USA, c1920–55: boom, bust and recovery

Overview

This option comprises a study in depth of economic and social change in the USA from the post-war boom of the 1920s, through depression, recovery and war, to the transformation of many aspects of US society in the years immediately after 1945.

Students will gain an in-depth understanding of economic change and its long-term effects, the growing demands by black Americans for social equality, and the cultural changes driven by individuals and by technological change.

Key topics	Content
1 Boom and crash, 1920–29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The economic boom of the 1920s: mass production; technological advances and their impact on leisure; the automobile; hire purchase; laissez faire; farmers, black Americans and limits to the boom. • Causes of the crash of 1929: the Wall Street Crash; overproduction; land speculation; the bull market; weaknesses of the banking system. • Changes in society; immigration and the 'Red Scare'; the Ku Klux Klan; prohibition and organised crime; the changing role of women. • Cultural change in the 1920s: the Jazz Age; the Harlem Renaissance; growing popularity of baseball; radio and the cinema; American literature.
2 Depression and New Deal, 1929–38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The spread of the depression, 1929–32: growth of unemployment; collapse of GDP; effects on workers, families, farmers and ethnic minorities; 'gangsterism'. • Hoover's response to the depression, 1929–33: the Smoot-Hawley Tariff; homelessness and the Hoovervilles; the Reconstruction Finance Corporation; Emergency Relief and Construction Act 1932. • Roosevelt and the First New Deal, 1933–35: emergency relief; public works; the alphabet agencies; help for farmers; reforming the financial system; opposition to Roosevelt's policies, including Huey Long and the Supreme Court. • The Second New Deal, 1935–38: the Wagner Act (1935) and industrial relations; the Social Security Act 1935; the Revenue Act 1935; opposition to the Second New Deal.

Key topics	Content
<p>3 Impact of the New Deal and the Second World War on the USA to 1945</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The New Deal and the economy: the impact of New Deal policies on unemployment and national infrastructure; women and the New Deal, including the role of Eleanor Roosevelt; the state of the US economy in 1940. • The impact of the New Deal and the war on ethnic minorities: New Deal policies and black Americans; the Indian Reorganisation Act 1934; change for hispanic Americans; the contribution of ethnic minorities to the war effort; the race riots of 1943; the Double V campaign. • Social and cultural changes: WPA support for writers and musicians; changes in the role of women, including impact of the Fair Employment Practices Commission on the status of women and black Americans; wartime domestic propaganda; the power of Hollywood, including war films and the rise of Disney; the growing power of radio; popular music. • The war and the economy, 1941–45: the collapse of unemployment; women and the war effort; the contribution of young people; growing power of trade unions; migration to urban and industrial centres; the growth of new industries.
<p>4 The transformation of the USA, 1945–55</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic transformation: changing employment opportunities; government policies to encourage growth; the provision of mortgages for veterans; growing mobility, including cars and highway construction. The growth of the suburbs; Levittown projects; the new consumer society. • The end of post-war euphoria: HUAC, McCarthyism and their impact; anti-communism and the Cold War context; the reality of the nuclear age, including Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. • Cultural change: Hollywood and the Cold War; the growing power of television, including popular entertainment and sitcoms, the stereotyping of women and ethnic minorities; the origins of a teenage culture, including rock'n'roll. • The changing status of minorities: Truman's desegregation of the armed forces; extent of integration in professional sports and popular entertainment; the growth of the NAACP; the Brown case 1954; the extent of change by 1955.