

Durham Johnston History Department



DURHAM JOHNSTON
COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL
DARK TO REWIS

Preparation for A Level



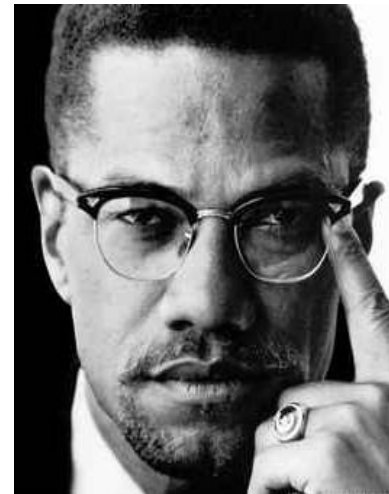
Unit 1 Y113:

*Britain 1930–1997
(Enquiry topic:
Churchill 1930–1951).*



Unit 2 Y213:

*The French
Revolution and the
rule of Napoleon
1774–1815.*



Unit 3 Y319:

*Civil Rights in the USA
1865–1992.*



Unit 4: Y100:

*An independent
piece of research
coursework on a
British Prime
Minister of your
choice from the
period 1930–1997.*

Dear students,

Congratulations on choosing to study A-Level History at Durham Johnston Comprehensive School. Our A-Level course is designed to give students an introduction to a wide array of topics, depth studies and skills which are not only important as preparation for further study and employment, but also for your development as active citizens in British society. The topics you will be studying will give you a much better understanding of Britain's recent history, a wider appreciation of the changes that took place in France in the late eighteenth century, and an understanding of the political, economic and social shifts in American society in over a century of rapid and significant change. You will be taught how to analyse key events, evaluate and reach judgements, build arguments and challenge others' viewpoints. You will also be shown how to research, apply a critical eye to sources of evidence about the past, and understand how and why historians can study the same material and yet reach widely differing perspectives.

In short- you are going to be doing a lot of thinking! History is a subject that rewards those who really engage with the material: the more you know, the easier the analysis and the better the judgements; the more you think about the key issues of the historical periods you're studying, the easier it becomes to produce convincing judgements about people and events that have shaped the world as we know it today.

The reading and activities are designed to allow you to begin to practise thinking like a historian, requiring analysis and evaluation of the key concept of historical significance.. You don't need to have any prior knowledge of the events or people being discussed in order to answer the question, although obviously any additional research or further reading would strengthen your answers. **We will use your answers to inform debate and discussion in your first lesson when we start in September**, and it will give you a good understanding of the type of work you can expect as you specialise further in your studies.

Good luck- and I look forward to meeting many of you in a few months' time.

Mr Doyle

Subject Leader for History

TASK:

Read through the information about a range of historical figures that you will encounter during your A-Level History course. Think about why each of them is considered historically significant, using the criteria below to help you. Then, for each one, try to explain why you believe that they were more significant than the others you have read about.

Use the table at the end of the document to explain your judgements.

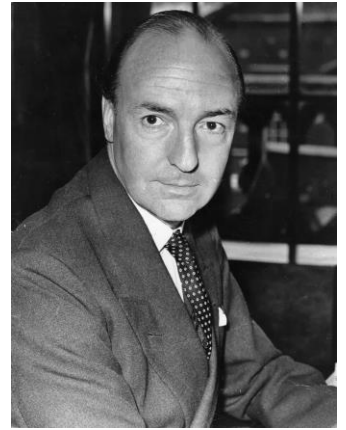
Historical significance

People or events can be significant in the following ways:

- **Revealing-** this person is significant because their story tells us a lot about the people involved or the time that it took place
- **Remembered-** this person is significant because our society has chosen to remember them
- **Remarkable-** this person was significant because what they did or thought was shocking, new, exciting or dramatic
- **Results-** this person was significant because they caused change, either at the time or in the long-term
- **Resonant-** the life and times of this person reflect the anxieties and preoccupations of our current period.

BRITISH HISTORY: John Profumo

John Profumo was a British politician whose career both shone and fell apart in one of the most famous scandals of the 20th century. Born in 1915 into a well-to-do family, he excelled at school and served with distinction in the Royal Navy during World War II. After the war, he entered politics as a member of the Conservative Party and quickly developed a reputation for intelligence, charm, and dedication. In 1960, at only 44 years old, he was appointed Secretary of State for War, making him responsible for Britain's army during a tense period of the Cold War.



In this high-profile role, Profumo helped oversee military policy and troops' welfare, and he often spoke in Parliament about defence budgets and Britain's alliances. Many saw him as a rising star: a future Cabinet heavyweight or even prime minister. His speeches were confident, and colleagues admired his energy and commitment to public service. He toured army bases, met with soldiers and their families, and pushed for better conditions for those serving in remote parts of the world.

But in 1963, Profumo's career came crashing down. He began a brief affair with Christine Keeler, a young model who was also involved with a Soviet naval officer at the same time. Since Britain and the Soviet Union were global rivals, there were fears that secrets might have been shared- an especially serious concern during the Cold War, when trust and intelligence mattered more than ever. When rumours reached Parliament, Profumo denied any improper behaviour "in the House of Commons." Soon, however, evidence emerged that he had indeed lied. The resulting uproar forced him to resign from both his Cabinet position and his seat in Parliament.

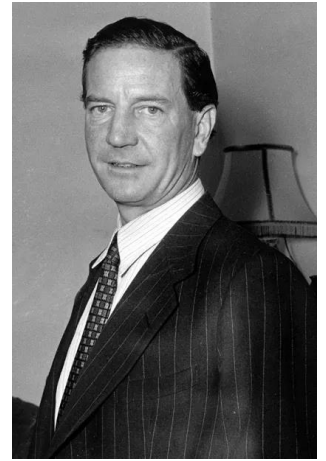
This "Profumo Affair" rattled public confidence in the government. For the first time, many people saw that their leaders could be dishonest about private conduct and that personal scandals could have real political consequences. The Conservative government's reputation suffered, and it lost the next general election later in 1964.

After his resignation, Profumo chose a very different path. He stayed out of the spotlight and devoted himself to charitable work in east London, helping the homeless and disadvantaged. For more than thirty years, he quietly volunteered at a local shelter, earning respect for his humility and perseverance. When he died in 2006, tributes often noted both his early promise and his later redemption through service.

John Profumo remains a significant figure because his story illustrates how personal mistakes can topple powerful careers, how trust is central to public life, and how genuine remorse and hard work can rebuild a reputation. Yet he remains controversial: some see his charity work as penance, while others believe he should have faced stronger punishment for misleading Parliament. Either way, his life teaches a lesson about responsibility, honesty, and the complicated relationship between private behaviour and public office.

BRITISH HISTORY: Kim Philby

Kim Philby was born Harold Adrian Russell “Kim” Philby in 1912 into a well-connected British family. Educated at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge, he impressed peers and professors with his intelligence and charm. While still a student in the early 1930s, Philby secretly joined the Communist Party, convinced that only radical change could halt the spread of fascism in Europe. Unbeknownst to his friends, he also began working for Soviet intelligence- a decision that would make him one of the most notorious traitors in British history.



After graduating, Philby entered the British diplomatic service and then the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). His rapid rise through the ranks owed as much to his social ease and upper-class background as to his genuine skill as an intelligence officer. By the time World War II broke out, he was working in Britain's counterespionage section, responsible for identifying Soviet spies. Ironically, Philby used his insider knowledge to sabotage MI6 investigations, steering his colleagues away from Soviet networks and ensuring that key Soviet agents remained undetected. His manipulation of files and reports allowed him to protect fellow double agents while feeding critical Allied secrets back to Moscow.

In the early Cold War era, Philby was posted to Washington, D.C., where he gained access to highly classified information shared between Britain and the United States. He passed details of joint operations, encryption methods, and agent identities to the KGB, causing untold damage to Western intelligence efforts. His betrayal went unnoticed for years, partly because he embodied the very image of a loyal British officer—polished, articulate, and impeccably dressed.

Suspicion began to mount in the mid 1950s, particularly after two of Philby's Cambridge colleagues- Donald Maclean and Guy Burgess- defected to the Soviet Union. Yet MI6 never fully pinned the blame on Philby until 1963, when evidence of his secret meetings with Soviet handlers became undeniable. Confronted by his superiors, he first denied everything, then quietly resigned. Shortly afterward, he escaped to Moscow, where the Soviets welcomed him as a hero and awarded him the Order of Lenin.

Philby's life in the Soviet Union was marked by privilege and isolation: he enjoyed state honours and a comfortable apartment, but he was forever cut off from his family and homeland. He died in 1988, still unrepentant.

Kim Philby's story is significant because it exposes how one person's betrayal can reshape international events. As a senior MI6 officer, he undermined his own country's security at the height of the Cold War. He remains controversial because his motives- whether driven by ideology, ego, or personal grievance- are still debated. To some, he was a committed idealist fighting fascism; to others, a self-serving double-dealer whose duplicity cost lives and trust. Even today, Philby's legacy is a stark reminder of how appearances can deceive and how fragile the bonds of loyalty can be when ideology takes hold.

BRITISH HISTORY: Enoch Powell

Enoch Powell (1912–1998) was a British politician whose powerful mind and provocative speeches left a lasting mark on his country's political life. Born in Birmingham to a schoolteacher father, Powell showed early brilliance: he won scholarships to Cambridge University, where he studied classics and mastered ancient languages.

His early career combined scholarship with public service: he worked at the Treasury, served in

World War II as a brigadier, and later became a professor of Greek at Sydney University. This mix of academic achievement and practical experience made him a respected voice in British politics.



Powell entered Parliament in 1950 as a Conservative MP for Wolverhampton, quickly earning a reputation for intellectual rigor and clear argument. He held junior ministerial roles under Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and was appointed Minister of Health in 1960, overseeing hospitals and medical staff at a time when the National Health Service was still young. Later, as Shadow Defence Secretary, he spoke forcefully about Britain's place in the world and the importance of a strong military. His clear, confident speaking style, drawn from his classical training, made him one of the most memorable orators in the House of Commons.

Yet it was in April 1968 that Powell became one of the most controversial figures in modern British history. In what became known as the “Rivers of Blood” speech, he criticized immigration and warned of community conflict if the government did not curb the arrival of new residents from the Commonwealth. Although many voters felt Powell was speaking their fears, politicians from all major parties condemned the speech as racist and inflammatory. He was swiftly dismissed from the Shadow Cabinet, and the phrase “rivers of blood” entered public debate as a symbol of divisive politics. Despite this, Powell's words influenced immigration policy discussions for decades, demonstrating his ability to shape national conversation- even when barred from official office.

After leaving the Conservatives, Powell continued to serve as an independent MP, later joining the Ulster Unionist Party to represent a Northern Ireland constituency. He opposed Britain's entry into the European Economic Community, arguing for national sovereignty, and campaigned against the devolution of power to Scotland and Wales. While he never held high office again, his arguments on Europe and national identity resonated with many who felt Britain was losing control over its affairs.

Enoch Powell's legacy remains complex. To supporters, he was a principled defender of free speech, national sovereignty, and fiscal responsibility. To critics, he embodied the worst of racial prejudice and fear-mongering. His life reminds us that a gifted speaker can profoundly influence a nation—for better or worse—and that political courage and controversy often walk hand in hand.

BRITISH HISTORY: Wallis Simpson

Wallis Simpson (1896–1986) was an American socialite whose relationship with King Edward VIII changed the course of the British monarchy and sparked one of the 20th century's greatest constitutional crises. Born Bessie Wallis Warfield in Pennsylvania, she married twice before meeting Edward, Prince of Wales, in 1931. Her ease in high society and flair for fashion quickly made her a celebrated hostess—but also a lightning rod for gossip.



When Edward became king in January 1936, Wallis's every move was watched. As a twice divorced American, she flouted the rigid expectations of royal life. Edward's passion for Wallis led him to propose marriage, a decision that shocked politicians, church leaders, and the public. At that time, the Church of England forbade the monarch to marry a divorced person whose former spouse was still alive. Faced with an impossible choice between his crown and the woman he loved, Edward chose Wallis. In December 1936, he abdicated—becoming the only British sovereign to voluntarily give up the throne—and they married the following year. Overnight, Wallis went from social host to Duchess of Windsor, while Edward became Duke of Windsor, living mostly abroad.

The couple's new role was fraught with tension. In exile, they travelled widely—often staying at luxury hotels but never fully accepted by high society or the royal family. Rumours swirled that their lavish lifestyle was paid for by loans from Nazi Germany, and that they harboured sympathies for Hitler, a serious allegation as Europe moved toward war. British intelligence monitored them, worried that the Duke's reluctance to serve in active roles during World War II and Wallis's private meetings with German diplomats might undermine the Allied cause.

After the war, the Windsors settled in France, where Wallis managed their household and social calendar with meticulous attention. She redecorated estates, hosted diplomatic gatherings, and maintained a close circle of friends from Hollywood to high finance. Yet life in exile meant that neither she nor her husband ever regained real influence in British public life. Edward's throne was taken by his brother, George VI, and later passed to Queen Elizabeth II.

Wallis's legacy remains controversial. Admirers remember her charm, style, and courage to follow her heart against overwhelming odds. Critics point to her role in the abdication—arguing that her ambition cost Edward a crown—and to the wartime rumours of political naiveté or worse. Even today, debates continue over how much influence she truly wielded and whether she harmed Britain's global standing. Wallis Simpson's story shows how personal relationships can collide with national duty, and how one woman's presence at the side of a king could reshape an empire's destiny.

FRENCH HISTORY: The Marquis de Lafayette

Gilbert du Motier, better known as the Marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834), was a young French noble whose passion for liberty carried him across an ocean to shape two revolutions. Born into an aristocratic family, Lafayette was raised with privilege but also a deep sense of honour. At just nineteen, he was captivated by news of the American colonies' fight against British rule. Defying his king's orders, he sailed to North America in 1777, eager to support a cause he believed would advance freedom everywhere.



In the American Revolution, Lafayette quickly won the trust of George Washington and rose to the rank of major general. He led troops in key battles, including Brandywine and Yorktown, and helped secure vital French support that turned the tide against Britain. Beyond the battlefield, he championed ideas of individual rights—urging Virginia's legislature to abolish slavery and pushing for legal protections against arbitrary arrest, ideals that would echo through later generations.

Returning to France in 1781, Lafayette brought home the spirit of the American Revolution. In 1789, as financial crises and popular unrest shook Paris, he was chosen to lead the new National Guard, charged with keeping order in a capital on the brink of chaos. He drafted the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,” a foundational statement asserting that all men are born free and equal in rights. He believed that a constitutional monarchy—where the king's powers would be limited by law—offered the best path for his country.

Yet Lafayette's moderate stance soon proved controversial. Radical revolutionaries accused him of betraying popular demands for deeper social change, while royalists distrusted his revolutionary sympathies. When the king tried to flee Paris in 1791, Lafayette led troops to stop him. However, this act angered both sides, leaving him isolated. In 1792, he was denounced as a traitor by the most extreme factions and forced into hiding. Eventually, he was arrested by Austrian forces and spent five years imprisoned.

After Napoleon's rise and fall, Lafayette returned to France in 1815, welcomed by crowds who remembered his early idealism. He served briefly in the Chamber of Deputies, advocating constitutional limits on power and civil liberties. In 1824, President John Quincy Adams invited him back to the United States, where he toured all twenty-four states to cheering multitudes, hailed as the 'hero of two worlds'.

Lafayette's life illustrates how one person's commitment to liberty can influence nations—even if holding the middle path draws criticism from both extremes. His military bravery, political leadership, and unwavering belief in basic human rights made him a symbol of international freedom, while his attempts to bridge radical and conservative demands left him caught between friends and enemies alike. Today, statues of Lafayette stand in both Paris and Washington, reminding us that the fight for balanced liberty often comes at a personal cost.

FRENCH HISTORY: Maximilien Robespierre

Maximilien Robespierre (1758–1794) rose from a modest upbringing in Arras to become one of the most powerful—and polarizing—figures of the French Revolution. Trained as a lawyer, he entered politics with a reputation for honesty and a fierce belief in equality. As France teetered on the brink of collapse under royal debt and widespread hunger, Robespierre argued that the people's rights should guide every decision.



Elected to the Estates General in 1789, he quickly joined forces with other reformers to draft the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, declaring that liberty and justice belonged to all Frenchmen. His clear voice and ethical stance won him support among urban crowds, and he became known as “the Incorruptible.” Yet as threats multiplied—from food shortages to foreign armies seeking to restore the king—Robespierre urged more radical measures.

By 1793, he served on the Committee of Public Safety, the de facto executive branch charged with defending the Revolution. Determined to protect the new republic, he backed a wide-ranging campaign against anyone deemed an enemy of liberty. Revolutionary tribunals tried suspects in swift, public trials; many were condemned and guillotined. This period, later called the Reign of Terror, claimed thousands of lives. Robespierre believed harsh justice was necessary to secure lasting freedom, arguing that “terror” directed against tyrants would shield the innocent and preserve the Revolution's ideals.

While some praised his dedication—crediting him with saving France from invasion and internal conspiracies—others recoiled at the bloodshed and centralized power. Even fellow revolutionaries began to fear that his definition of “enemy” could sweep up any opponent. As autumn of 1794 approached, the mood turned: deputies in the Convention saw Robespierre's influence as a threat to their own safety. In July, he was arrested and, without a trial, executed the next day.

Robespierre's legacy is a study in contrasts. He championed universal rights, pushed for bans on slavery in French colonies, and fought corruption with unyielding resolve. His speeches still echo as calls for fairness and public virtue. Yet his willingness to authorize mass executions casts a long shadow: the same man who wrote of human dignity presided over one of history's most intense periods of political violence.

Today, Robespierre's story helps us understand how revolutionary passion can bring rapid change but also risk sliding from idealism into fear-driven extremes. His name reminds students that the line between defending freedom and enforcing it can be frighteningly thin—and that even the most sincere leaders can become symbols of both hope and horror.

FRENCH HISTORY: Jean-Paul Marat

Jean-Paul Marat (1743–1793) was a French doctor turned political firebrand whose words stirred the passions of ordinary people during the French Revolution. Born in Switzerland, Marat trained in medicine in Paris and London before returning to France, where he treated the poor and witnessed on-the-ground suffering under an unequal monarchy. Frustrated by injustice, he turned to writing, founding the newspaper *L'Ami du Peuple* (The Friend of the People) in 1789. With bold headlines and fiery editorials, Marat gave a voice to the working-class “sans-culottes,” rallying them to demand bread, fair laws, and an end to privileges for the nobility.



Marat's role in France's political life lay less in holding office than in shaping public opinion. He sat briefly in the National Convention in 1792 but was often too radical even for fellow revolutionaries. His articles named aristocrats and moderate revolutionaries as traitors, calling for swift justice—sometimes proposing lists of those to be arrested or executed. As foreign armies threatened France and internal dissent grew, Marat argued that terror and firm measures were necessary to protect the republic. He famously declared that anyone who would not fight for the Revolution should be killed; his uncompromising stance helped pave the way for the Reign of Terror.

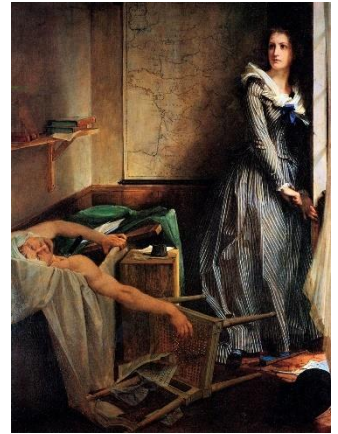
Yet Marat's influence came at a cost. His constant calls for violence and denunciations of opponents made him a lightning rod for controversy. Moderates accused him of stoking mob rule and undermining justice, while radical supporters sometimes unleashed street violence in his name. His insistence on rooting out “enemies of the people” blurred the line between accountability and murder. Even among Jacobin leaders, his extremism was alarming; some feared that unchecked executions would consume the Revolution itself.

Marat himself became a martyr when, in July 1793, he was murdered in his bath by Charlotte Corday, a young Girondin sympathizer convinced that killing him would save France from further bloodshed. His death galvanized his followers, who portrayed him as the ultimate victim of counter-revolution. They erected his portrait in the Convention and gave him a state funeral, turning his grave into a shrine. In the months that followed, his name was invoked to justify even harsher crackdowns on dissent.

Today, Marat is remembered both as a fierce champion of the poor and as a symbol of how revolutionary zeal can slip into ruthless intolerance. His newspapers remind us of the power—and danger—of words in politics. Though celebrated by some as the “voice of the people,” his career also warns that demanding justice too fiercely can become its own form of tyranny.

FRENCH HISTORY: Charlotte Corday

Charlotte Corday (1768–1793) is remembered as the young French woman whose single act of violence shook the heart of the Revolution—and whose motivations and consequences remain debated today. Born into a minor aristocratic family in Normandy, Corday was educated and deeply influenced by the Enlightenment ideas of reason, virtue, and moral duty. She admired writers who argued that tyranny must be resisted, yet she also feared that the Revolution in Paris was spinning into chaos.



By early 1793, Paris was roiled by food shortages, political purges, and the growing power of radical factions. Jean-Paul Marat, a fiery journalist and member of the radical Jacobin faction, was calling for swift executions of anyone he deemed an “enemy of the people.” Corday believed that Marat’s bloodthirsty rhetoric was driving France toward an endless cycle of violence and that his influence was the Revolution’s greatest danger.

Disguising her journey as a sympathizer, Corday travelled to Paris in July 1793. She claimed to bring a list of counter-revolutionaries for Marat’s consideration. When she entered his makeshift bath-chamber—where Marat often worked while suffering from a skin ailment—she plunged a kitchen knife into his chest, killing him instantly. Corday did not flee; she waited for authorities to arrest her, convinced that her deed would restore reason to the Revolution.

Corday’s act had immediate political impact. Marat became a martyr to the radicals, his death used to justify even harsher measures against dissent. The Convention gave him a hero’s funeral, and his image was woven into the Revolution’s iconography. Meanwhile, Corday was tried for murder. In her calm, dignified defence, she insisted she had killed one man to save many. The court swiftly condemned her, and she was guillotined just four days after Marat’s assassination.

In the years that followed, Corday’s reputation split. Royalists and moderates hailed her as a courageous patriot who dared to strike a blow against tyranny. They celebrated her as “l’ange de l’assassinat” (the angel of the assassination), arguing that she sacrificed herself to check the Revolution’s extremes. Radicals denounced her as a cold-blooded killer and an apologist for royalist plots. Her aristocratic background and personal faith further fueled debates over whether she was motivated by personal conviction or by counter-revolutionary forces.

Charlotte Corday’s legacy endures as a study in moral complexity. She was significant not because she changed France’s government with broad armies or sweeping laws, but because one determined individual challenged the course of a great upheaval. Her story forces us to ask whether violence can ever be a justified remedy for violence, and whether the line between heroism and villainy is drawn by act or by outcome. In the end, Corday remains both celebrated and condemned—a reminder that even the noblest motives can lead to the darkest deeds.

US HISTORY: Thurgood Marshall

Thurgood Marshall (1908–1993) rose from humble beginnings in Baltimore to become a trailblazing lawyer and the first African American justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. As the grandson of a slave and the son of schoolteachers, Marshall learned early that laws could both protect and oppress. After graduating from Howard University's law school, he joined the NAACP's legal team in the 1930s, determined to challenge segregation and discrimination.



Marshall's most famous victory came in 1954, when he argued *Brown v. Board of Education* before the Supreme Court. Drawing on decades of unequal "separate but equal" rulings, he persuaded the justices that segregated schools could never truly offer the same opportunities and dignity to Black children. The unanimous decision to end school segregation marked a turning point in American history, energizing the civil rights movement and affirming that the courts could be a force for social change.

In the years that followed, Marshall argued dozens of cases against discriminatory laws- from voting restrictions and housing covenants to police brutality- building a legal foundation for broader civil rights reforms. His courtroom successes helped pave the way for landmark legislation in the 1960s, including the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, reshaping the country's political life by breaking down legal barriers that had denied millions full participation in democracy. In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson nominated Marshall to the Supreme Court. His appointment was celebrated by many as a long-overdue step toward a more inclusive judiciary. On the bench, Justice Marshall continued to champion individual liberties. He often wrote opinions in favour of due process, free speech, and criminal defendants' rights, emphasizing that the Constitution must protect the most vulnerable against government overreach.

Yet Marshall's legacy is not without controversy. Critics accused him of "judicial activism," arguing that he pressed social change from the bench rather than deferring to elected legislatures. Some civil libertarians worried that his strong stance on defendants' rights would hamper law enforcement. Others felt that his decisions on matters like affirmative action and executive power tipped legal balance toward preferred policy outcomes rather than neutral interpretation of statutes.

Despite dissent from conservative justices and public figures, Marshall remained convinced that the law could- and should- serve as a tool for justice, not just order. His influence stretched beyond individual cases: by demonstrating the power of litigation to challenge entrenched discrimination, he inspired generations of lawyers and activists to pursue equality through legal channels. Today, Thurgood Marshall stands as a reminder that one dedicated individual can reshape the meaning of justice. His career shows both the promise of constitutional law to advance human dignity and the sparks of debate that follow when courts step into the arena of social change.

US HISTORY: Phyllis Schlafly

Phyllis Schlafly (1924–2016) was a conservative activist whose powerful voice reshaped American politics in the late 20th century. Born in St. Louis to a family of Czech and German descent, she excelled in debate and writing at college before earning a law degree. Early in her career, Schlafly joined the Eisenhower administration, where she advised on domestic policy and honed her talent for clear, persuasive communication.



In the 1960s and 1970s, Schlafly emerged as a leading figure in the battle over the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a proposed addition to the U.S. Constitution designed to guarantee equal legal rights for women. While many women's groups celebrated the ERA as a step toward full gender equality, Schlafly warned that it would eliminate certain protections for housewives, undermine traditional family roles, and force women into military draft. She organized a nationwide grassroots campaign—mobilizing thousands of “STOP ERA” volunteers—to persuade state legislatures to reject the amendment. Her strategy combined straightforward pamphlets, speaking tours in small-town America, and alliances with church and community groups, turning what had seemed a sure victory for ERA supporters into a narrow defeat when the amendment failed to gain the required state ratifications by 1982.

Schlafly's work did not stop there. She founded the Eagle Forum, which advocated for limited government, strong national defence, and conservative social values. Through newsletters, radio broadcasts, and leadership conferences, she influenced debates over taxes, school prayer, and Supreme Court nominations. Her belief that government power should be restrained, and that parents and local communities should guide children's education, won her a dedicated following—especially among middleclass families worried about rapid social changes.

Yet Schlafly's legacy remains controversial. Supporters admired her energy and plainspoken style, seeing her as a champion of traditional families and a voice for those who felt overlooked by elite policymakers. Critics accused her of stirring fear of social progress—arguing that her warnings about the ERA exaggerated its effects and that her stance set back feminist goals of workplace equality and reproductive rights. Her outspoken views on issues like abortion and homosexuality sparked heated debates about women's roles and civil liberties.

In later years, Schlafly continued writing books and influencing conservative politics, celebrating victories like the defeat of nationalized health care proposals and the appointments of conservative judges.

Phyllis Schlafly's story shows how one determined individual, armed with clear arguments and grassroots organization, can challenge a powerful movement and leave a lasting mark on political life—while also igniting fierce disagreements over the country's values and direction.

US HISTORY: Russell Means

Russell Means (1939–2012) was a Native American activist whose fierce passion and bold tactics helped bring attention to Indigenous rights in the United States. Born on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, Means grew up immersed in Lakota culture but also saw firsthand the poverty, broken treaties, and government neglect that many Native communities endured. Determined to fight for his people, he joined the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the late 1960s, a group formed to secure better housing, education, and legal rights for Native Americans.



Means quickly became one of AIM's most visible leaders. In 1973, he helped organize the 71-day occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota—the site of an 1890 massacre of Lakota people by U.S. soldiers. By taking over this symbolic place, Means and his fellow activists forced national media to report on broken treaty promises, police brutality on reservations, and the need for tribal self governance. Though the standoff ended in arrests and tense negotiations, it marked a turning point: many Americans began to see that Indigenous communities were still fighting for basic justice, and federal policies toward tribes began to change.

Beyond Wounded Knee, Means travelled the country speaking at rallies, universities, and churches, demanding treaty enforcement and the return of Native lands. He challenged schools to teach true histories, not just heroic explorers. He encouraged young people to reclaim their languages and traditions. In 1992, he even ran for vice president with the Libertarian Party, arguing that tribes should hold the same sovereignty that some saw as consistent with small government principles. His candidacy—though unlikely to win—highlighted the idea that Indigenous nations were distinct political entities, not just minority communities within America.

Yet Means's confrontational style and outspoken pride stirred controversy. Some critics accused him of glorifying violence or of alienating potential allies by calling for full tribal independence. His public statements sometimes clashed with more moderate tribal leaders who preferred quiet negotiation over high profile actions. At times, Means's fierce defence of sovereignty drew criticism for overshadowing practical gains, like securing federal funding or legal victories in court.

In later years, Means turned to film and theatre, starring in movies and writing memoirs that celebrated Native culture. He continued to speak on reservation issues until his death in 2012 from complications of cancer. Today, Russell Means is remembered both as a charismatic agitator who shocked America into paying attention and as a visionary who insisted that Indigenous peoples must be masters of their own destinies. His legacy lives on in youth who organize around tribal rights, cultural revival, and the belief that standing up boldly can force history to change course.

US HISTORY: Frances Perkins

Frances Perkins (1880–1965) shattered glass ceilings by becoming the first woman to serve in a U.S. presidential cabinet—and in the process reshaped American labour laws and social welfare. Born Frances Keppel in Boston, she grew up witnessing poverty and child labour. After studying economics at Mount Holyoke College and Columbia University, she moved to New York City to help immigrants and factory workers through settlement houses. When she saw the gruesome aftermath of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire—where 146 garment workers died because exits were locked—she vowed to fight for safer workplaces and fair treatment on the job.



In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt tapped Perkins to be his Secretary of Labor, a role she held for twelve years—longer than anyone before or since. At a time when unemployment was sky high and families were desperate, she used her office to build the backbone of the “New Deal” safety net. Perkins helped draft the Social Security Act of 1935, providing retirement pensions and unemployment insurance for millions. She championed the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which established a national minimum wage, limited workweeks to forty hours, and outlawed child labour. Through the Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration, she organized jobs that put people back to work rebuilding roads, parks, and public buildings.

Perkins’s leadership extended beyond legislation. She convened conferences bringing together labour leaders and employers to negotiate fair wages and hours, and she pressed Congress to enforce workplace inspections, protect migrant workers, and end discriminatory practices. Her policies established the idea that government had a responsibility to safeguard its citizens’ economic security and dignity.

Yet Perkins’s career was not without controversy. Business groups and conservative politicians accused her of pushing “socialist” or “Big Government” schemes that interfered with free enterprise. Some opponents claimed Social Security would bankrupt the country or discourage personal savings. Others argued that her labour rules would choke small businesses. Even within her own party, she sometimes faced criticism for being too pragmatic, settling for compromises that left some workers behind.

As a woman in a male dominated Washington, she endured doubts about her authority and struggled to be taken seriously. Still, she balanced firmness with empathy, famously telling senators that “people are not margins on a balance sheet” but real lives deserving protection. When she stepped down in 1945, Social Security covered over forty million Americans, and labour standards had become a cornerstone of modern workplace rights. Frances Perkins’s legacy lives on whenever someone turns sixty-five to claim a Social Security check or sees a poster reminding them of their minimum wage pay. She showed that one determined woman, armed with compassion and expertise, could change the course of a nation.

Political Figure	What impact did they have?	In what way should this person be considered historically significant, and why?	Why did you consider this figure to be more significant than the others?
British:			
French:			
US:			