**America 1920-1973 Opportunity and Inequality**

**Revision Guide 3: Post-war America**

**American Society and the economy after 1945**

**Prosperity and Consumerism:** Rapid economic growth provided a comfortable lifestyle for many Americans. USA producing ½ the world’s goods – benefitted from 2WW.

***‘The American Dream’:*** By 1960 living standard of the average American = 3 x that of av. British person.

* New suburbs - the car - spending rather than saving was the norm
* Hire purchase allowed buying of luxuries - modern conveniences in most homes

Compared to 1920s, wealth was spread further down social scale but still some excluded.

**Popular culture**: Dominated by TV, radio and cinema. Films made at this time reflect the confidence and optimism of the time.

1. Teenagers: Had more leisure time and spending money than before…..spend on own styles and culture. By 1950s some rebellion (reflected and encouraged in movies: James Dean/ Marlon Brando.
2. Rock ‘n’ Roll: Reflected teenage rebellion. Singers like Elvis Presley shocked parents, loved by fans
3. TV: 1948: 0.4% households owned a TV, by 1958: 83%. Dominated by commercial stations and advertising encouraged yet more spending. Most programmes entertaining (soap operas, quiz shows) but national news channels also developing.

**McCarthyism**

The Red Scare of the 1920s had not gone away. By the late 1940s US fear of communism continued and there was a sense that the American values of democracy and freedom were under threat. In the post war world, the USSR had strengthened the grip of communism to all of Eastern Europe and in 1949 China fell to communism.

**House Committee of Un-American Activities** (HCUA) est. by Congress to investigate communist involvement in govt., education and film industry. Fears peaked 1950 (Korean War).

Senator Joe McCarthy started campaign against possible communists – ‘Reds under the beds’ – claimed many working secretly in govt. People called to ‘prove’ their loyalty. Some put on trial (reminiscent of witch-hunts of 17th century).

Eventually McCarthy investigated and exposed as bully with little to back up his accusations. But had helped create anti-communist hysteria. Had important supporters e.g. J Edgar Hoover (FBI) who kept files on 1million suspects.

**Racial Tensions and development of the Civil Rights Movement**

Racial prejudice common between wars and continued after 2WW despite black contribution to war effort.

**Segregation laws**

* Many Southern states continued to enforce segregation or ‘Jim Crow’ laws –separate public facilities for blacks and whites
* Blacks had right to vote but often didn’t as they were intimidated from registering to vote – violence/ literacy tests etc.
* Judiciary was white and juries all white – very hard for blacks to achieve justice.
* Discrimination in employment e.g. white teachers earned 30% more than black teachers in South.
* Best universities closed to blacks.

**Struggle for Equal Education**

For decades it was legal for blacks and whites to be educated separately and supposedly equally, but usually black schools poorly funded.

1954: NAACP challenged the legality of separate education in a case that was heard by the Supreme Court – Brown vs Board of Education. The SC ruled against separate education (said it was not possible for separate education to be equal it created sense of inferiority in black students). SC ordered South to integrate schools but there was fierce resistance for years,

***Little Rock Arkansas 1957***

IN 1957 the SC ordered Gov. Faubus of Arkansas to let 9 black students attend a white high school in Little Rock. Faubus ordered state troops to help prevent the black students entering the school. Mobs met the 9 students as they tried to attend school. Pres. Eisenhower had to send federal troops to protect the students and enable them to attend school.

**Martin Luther King and peaceful protest**

**Montgomery bus boycott (1955-56):** Rosa Parks, CR activist, wanted to challenge segregation laws on Montgomery buses. Arrested for not giving up her seat to white person. Activists formed MIA (Montgomery Improvement Association) which organised bus boycott (MLK as leader). Bus company lost 65% income. Significant intimidation of protesters.

Dec 56: SC declared Montgomery bus laws illegal. Victory for non-violent direct action.

**Direct Action 1956-64**

* Southern Christian Leadership Conference **(SCLC)** established by MLK
* Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating committee **(SNCC)** est. by students
* Congress for Racial Equality **(CORE)** est. by James Farmer

1. **Sit-ins:** 1960 Greeensboro, N Carolina, Students staged a sit-in at a Woolworth;’s lunch counter (white only). SNCC spread the tactic to other towns. By end of 1960 lunch counters desegregated in 126 cities.
2. **Freedom Rides 1961:** CORE organised white and black activists to ride buses sat next to each other – as many states not obeying orders to desegregate buses. When buses arrived in South, often met by violent mobs and police did little to help activists. JFK had to step in to insist State Governor Patterson of Alabama, protested the riders.
3. **March on Washington 1963:** MLK and other organisations staged a march of 200,000 blacks and 50,000 whites on Washington. Aim = to put pressure on JFK to pass a civil rights bill to end all public segregation. MLK gave his famous ‘I have a Dream’ speech – huge public impact.

**Civil Rights Act 1964**

JFK became increasingly committed to tackling civil rights inequality as a result of the many protests. Before he was killed he started to push though Congress a civil rights bill. The new President Johnson made sure that the bill became law in July 1964.

The Civil Rights Act effectively outlawed segregation in public places.

Attention then shifted to ensure black people had equal rights to vote.

Selma 1965: Voting rights march organised by MLK. 15,000 black population old enough to vote. Only 335 registered to vote! Marchers brutally attacked (as expected) by police. Media called it ‘Bloody Sunday’. MLK cut short march (to anger of some more radical activists) but helped convince President to push through…….

**The Voting Rights Act 1965**

Ended all tests and discrimination against people trying to register to voter (e.g. outlawed literacy tests). Effect was immediate and black voters started to have an impact on electing black officials.

**Civil Rights Act 1968**

Made it illegal to rent or sell houses on the grounds of race, religion, national origin or sex.

**Malcolm X and the Black Power movement**

Not all blacks were supportive of non-violent direct action. Black nationalists felt a more confrontational response was justified and that equality was not the aim, but separation was.

* Nation of Islam attracted support. Powerful speaker for the movement in the early 60s was Malcolm X – critical of MLK’s methods. Demanded blacks have their own state. Malcolm X was killed in 1965.
* SNCC became more radical after 1966 under Stokely Carmichael. Wanted ‘Black Power’
* Black Panthers: 2,000 members almost like a private army. For armed struggle for equal rights. Clashed with police (9 killed 67-69).

**Race riots 1965-67**

Just after the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act were passed, widespread race riots in northern and Western cities (never had segregation). Years of discrimination and poverty meant cities divided by race. Poor relations with (white) police….an outburst of anger. Worst rioting in Watts LA.

**Impact of Black Power?**

* Publicised disillusionment of many blacks
* Raised awareness of issues of social and economic inequality outside of the South.
* Alienated some white support (support of government)
* Gave excuse for police to crack down on activists.

**Assassination of Martin Luther King 1968**

Killed. Probably by a hired killer. Achievements include CR Act and the end of segregation in the South. Black civil rights now legal. BUT racist attitudes remained……

**America and the Great Society**

JFK: 1961-63 Johnson 1963-1968 Both Democrats

JFK’s New Frontier programme tried to tackle social problems of the poor

* Unemployment benefit extended - increases in social security
* more aid to poor areas (for housing and transport)

Johnson’s Great Society continued JFK’s work:

* The Economic Opportunity Act 1964:Training for disadvantaged youths /recruited volunteers to work in low-income areas
* Medicare and Medicaid 1965: provided medical insurance for over 65s and hospital care for the poor
* The Development Act 1964: Money provided to replace inner city slums

It was opposed by some Republicans who hated government interference and it did not solve all problems. Achievements lost as Johnson’s focus and money increasingly turned to Vietnam.

**The Feminist Movement**

Women had achieved right to vote in 1920. 2 x World wars had changed the number and roles of working women but still in 1950s the main social attitude was that a married woman’s place was in the home.

1960s decade for change in women’s rights (alongside civil rights ).

1963:’ The Feminist Mystique’ by Betty Friedan was a starting point for the feminist movement – said home was ‘like a concentration camp’ that many women wanted to break out of.

* **National Organisation for Women (NOW), 1966;** Est. by Friedan.
* Fight for equal pay: After protests **Equal Pay Act** passed in 1963. But still campaigning in 1972 as women’s pay only 72% of men’s- legislation not fully effective.
* **Roe vs Wade 1973**: Supreme Court made abortion legal, outlawing many state laws which banned abortion
* **Supreme Court Ruling 1972**: Ruled contraception should be available to unmarried couples on same basis as married couples.
* **Equal Rights Amendment 1972:** Very controversial. Passed by Congress but never ratified by the necessary number of States. Backlash from more traditional women.
* Many protests against everyday sexism/traditional women’s magazines/all men’s clubs.

**Exam style questions: The American People and the Boom**

**Interpretation A:** Clayborne Carson, Professor of History, Stanford University , 1994

Both civil rights and black power leaders were able to gain national prominence most readily by emphasising intangible goals – civil/human rights and increased group pride – rather than tangible, especially economic goals……….. all black leaders found it easier to transform the status and esteem of African Americans…….. without having much impact on the living conditions of the poor and working class blacks.

**Interpretation B:** Benjamin E Mays , President of Morehouse College ( an all-male, black college of Atlanta University), in his eulogy to Martin Luther King at King’s funeral in 1968.

No reasonable person would deny that the activities and personality of Martin Luther King Jr., contributed largely to the success of the student sit-in movements in abolishing segregation in downtown establishments; and that his activities contributed mightily to the passage of civil rights legislation of 1964 and 1965. He died striving to desegregate and integrate America….nonviolence to King was total commitment not only in solving the problems of race in the United States but in solving the problems of the world.

1. How does Interpretation B differ from Interpretation A about the achievements of black civil rights leaders?

Explain your answer using Interpretations A and B. (4 marks)

1. Why might the authors of Interpretation A and B have a different interpretation about the achievements of black civil rights leaders?

Explain your answer using Interpretations A and B and your contextual knowledge. (4 marks)

1. Which interpretation do you find the most convincing about the achievements of black civil rights leaders?

Explain your answer using Interpretations A and B and your contextual knowledge. (8 marks)

1. Describe the two ways in which the Civil Right Acts of the 1960s helped to stop racial discrimination.

(4 marks)

1. In what ways were American attitudes and lifestyles affected by television in the 1950s and 60s?

Explain your answer. (8 marks)

1. Which of the following was a more important reason why Senator McCarthy was so successful in encouraging the fear of communism?

* The international situation around 1950
* The situation inside America around 1950.

Explain your answer with reference to both reasons. (12 marks)