

Byrchall School

History Department

Revision Notes

America, 1920-1973: Opportunity and Equality

The American people and the boom - the 1920s

Social Isolationism; Immigration

More than 40 million people moved to the USA between 1850 and 1914. By the end of the First World War, American society was a mixture of a hundred different nationalities.

The idea of isolation led to immigration being slowed down. Those who were against immigration wanted to in particular keep out people from Asia and Eastern Europe. Americans feared that new immigrants would take their jobs, or worse still, they might try to spread the communist ideas.

- The Immigration Law (1917) required all immigrants to prove that they could read English.
- The Emergency Quota Act (1921) limited the number of immigrants to 357,000 per year. The number of people coming to the USA from any one country already living in the USA in 1910.
- The National Origins Act (1924) reduced the quota to 2 per cent of the population and set the date back to 1890.
- In 1929, the number of immigrants each year was reduced to 150,000, and immigration from Asia was blocked altogether.

The 'Red Scare'

Another effect of isolationism was not trusting immigrants. Immigrants were given the lowest-paid jobs. Areas of the cities became immigrant ghettos. In these ghettos, housing was poor, and violence and crime were high.

Americans greatly feared communism. They felt that their free lifestyle was under serious threat.

In the early 1920s this fear became wide spread. The idea that immigrants were communists was called the 'Red Scare'. The fear got worse after a number of bombs were planted by Italian communists and anarchists (people who did not believe in laws).

On 16 September 1920, a bomb on a horse-drawn wagon exploded outside the Stock Exchange on Wall Street. The American newspapers called the bomb 'an act of war' and blamed Italian anarchists (the bombers were never captured).

In response to this and other bombs, the US attorney general, Palmer, ordered the arrest of 10,000 people suspected of being communist. The arrests were made during the so-called 'Palmer's Raids'. Any of those rounded up who were discovered to be immigrants were deported without trial.

Sacco and Vanzetti

The most famous case of injustice against immigrants involved two Italians, Sacco and Vanzetti. Sacco and Vanzetti were anarchist. In the 1920 they were charged with the murder of two guards in an armed robbery. 61 witnesses said the Italians were the killers. However, these witnesses could not

agree on the details of the crime, and there were 107 witnesses who swore to seeing the two men somewhere else at the time of the robbery. Largely because most of the defence witnesses were Italian immigrants, the jury found both men guilty of murder. They were executed in 1927.

The Boom of the 20s

In the 1920s the USA went through a period of economic prosperity - a boom. During this time it became the richest country in the world. Between 1920 and 1929, the number of motor cars on American roads, for example, increased from 9 million to 26 million.

Economic growth created a 'cycle of prosperity'. An increase in the production of consumer goods created more jobs. As a result, people had more money to spend on consumer goods. This increase in wealth encouraged an increase in production - and so on.

The Growth in Industry

The motor car industry was among the first to use **assembly lines** to produce goods in large quantities. The inventor of this method of production was Henry Ford. Ford's big idea was to make a motor car for the ordinary man and his family.

Ford's car was the Model T. The first Model T was produced in 1911. By the 1920s a Model T was being produced every ten seconds. Lots of production allowed Ford to reduce his prices. In 1911 a Model T had cost \$850; by 1920 it could be bought for \$295. One model T was identical to another. They were all the same colour (black), and all engines were the same size. The 'Tin Lizzie' as it was known, became the most popular car in the USA.

The car industry grew during the 1920s. It also helped other industries to grow - steel, rubber, glass, leather and oil were all in greater demand because of the car industry. The construction industry built roads for all the new traffic.

Other industries also grew during the 1920s. Other consumer goods made using mass-production methods included radios, telephones, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, washing machines and ovens.

Causes of the Boom

There were many causes of the economic boom during the 1920s:

1. The USA was rich in raw materials - especially land, people and oil.
2. The American industry grew during the First World War; the USA sold food and weapons to Europe with no competition from European countries.
3. American industry developed new production techniques.
 - The mass production of goods allowed the cost of making goods to come down.
 - By placing workers on an assembly line and giving each worker one specific task, factories could produce goods much more quickly and much more cheaply.

4. People could buy consumer goods more easily thanks to new credit facilities, especially **hire purchase** (which allowed a buyer to pay for something in instalments over a period of time).
5. Advertisements in magazines and newspapers, on the radio, in cinemas and on billboards.
6. Government policy also helped the boom. The Republican governments of the 1920s helped the growth of business by a policy of not getting involved in the economy. This approach is called **laissez-faire** - 'leave things alone'. The governments of the 1920s did not place any controls on industry or on financial institutions.
7. The government also protected American industry by placing tariffs on foreign goods coming into the USA. This made a foreign product more expensive than the same American product.
8. Thousands of ordinary people bought **stock and shares** in US businesses. The American Stock Exchange enjoyed a sustained bull market (a rise in all prices). Between 1921 and 1929, share prices rose 500 per cent.

Who did not get rich in 1920s America?

Although the 1920s were a 'boom' time for some, many Americans still lived in poverty. Some sections of the population lived in poverty:

1. Farmers struggled during the 1920s and almost half of all American people were involved in farming. Farmers made more food but they ended up making too much food. As a result, food prices dropped. Many small farmers forced to sell their land. Farm labourers also found themselves out of work and drifted to towns or to California.
2. Black Americans had a similar experience. Almost one million black farm workers lost their jobs in the 1920s. Many moved from their homes in the south to the cities in the north.
3. Workers in older industries also did not share in the prosperity of the 20s. The coal industry, for example, suffered as new forms of power - oil, gas and electricity - became more widely used.

The Roaring 1920s

In the 1920s young Americans wanted fun. They had money in their pockets and the entertainment industry gave them great ways to spend it.

Music

Jazz was a new kind of music. It came from early American-African music. Jazz was played in night clubs such as New York's Cotton Club by black musicians. Two of the most famous were Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong.

Another popular form of music at the time was blues. People could buy gramophone recordings of their favourite singers and play these records at home on the phonograph. Another way of listening

to music at home was to turn on the radio. The number of homes with radios rose from 60,000 in 1920 to 10 million in 1929.

Young people turned away from old-fashioned dances such as the waltz. New, wilder dances, such as the Charleston, took over.

Movies and Film

By 1929 more than 110 million Americans were going to the movies each week and nearly every town had its own cinema.

The first movies were silent films in black and white. Words were shown on screen, and cinemas employed piano players to provide background music. In 1927, however, people flocked to see Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer*, which was the first talkie (movie with a soundtrack). By the mid-1930s films were also being produced in colour, and Walt Disney had made the cartoon characters Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck into household names.

Most of the films were made in Hollywood; Hollywood became the film capital of the world. They created international film stars, such as Charlie Chaplin. When the movie heart-throb Rudolph Valentino died in 1926, thousands of fans attended his funeral.

Fads

After the First World War, many young people just wanted to have fun. They rebelled against their parents.

Young Americans went to the cinema. They watched basketball, baseball and American football. Jazz became a craze. It appealed to young Americans partly because the music itself was wild and dramatic.

The 20s was a time of crazes and fads, a time when youngsters joined in never-ending dance marathons or sat on top of a flagpole for weeks just to break a record. Popular heroes emerged. One was Charles Lindbergh, who in 1927 became the first man to fly solo across to Atlantic.

Flappers

Many young women became 'flappers'. A flapper's hair was short and bobbed. She tried to look flat-chested and wore a skirt that rose to the knee. She used lipstick and rouge, smoked cigarettes and drove a 'Tin Lizzie'.

The older people disliked what was happening to American society. The Anti-Flirt Association was set up to try and control the problem of the young.

The Ku Klux Klan

The Ku Klux Klan brought a racial and religious hatred. The Klan would only accept WASPS (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) as true Americans, that is, people who had originally come from northern Europe and whose families had lived in the USA for several generations.

All other people were not true Americans: Jews, Catholics, immigrants from southern Europe (such as Italians) from Eastern Europe (such as Russians), from Asia, and especially black people.

Membership of the Ku Klux Klan grew from 5000 members in 1920 to five million members in 1925.

Klan members were often poor whites who felt that their jobs were threatened by people who were willing to work for lower wages - blacks and immigrants. However, the Klan also had rich, including politicians, judges and policemen.

People in the KKK:

- Held ceremonies in which they dressed in long white robes.
- Spoke to each other in secret codes known as 'Klonversations'.
- Used torture and violence against people who were not 'true Americans'.
- Most often attacked black people; blacks were beaten, raped or lynched (hanged without trial), and their homes were set on fire and their property destroyed.

Prohibition - the Banning of Alcohol

'The era of **Prohibition**', was the time when the making, selling or transporting of alcoholic drink became illegal in the USA.

Prohibition was introduced because of groups such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League who wanted to have alcohol banned. These groups claimed that alcohol brought poverty, broke up marriage, caused crime and insanity and disrupted industry.

A separate law, called Volstead Act, defined an alcoholic drink as any drink that was more than 0.5 per cent alcohol.

Effects of Prohibition

- Many people made their own home made alcoholic drink. It was called '**moonshine**', and it was usually poor quality and often caused illness and even death.
- Secret bars called **speakeasies** were set up behind locked doors in cellars and back rooms. By 1930 there were nearly a quarter of a million speakeasies in the USA - and more than 30,000 in New York alone.
- The speakeasies sold alcohol smuggled from abroad by **bootleggers**. They brought in rum from the West Indies and whisky from Canada.

The Failure of Prohibition

- The prohibition Bureau employed 4000 agents for the whole of the USA. Some agents, like Eliot Ness, achieved some success.
- Most however, were not very good and 10% were sacked for taking bribes.
- Most Americans did not agree with Prohibition. This lack of popular support was the most important reason for the failure of Prohibition.

Prohibition ended in December in 1933 when President Roosevelt repealed the 18th Amendment.

Organised Crime and Gangsters

The money that could be made from illegal alcohol trade attracted gangsters. One of the most famous gangsters was Al Capone, who came from Chicago. Rivals were killed, and many of the city's leading police officers, judges and politicians were in his pay. Capone became a celebrity - he mixed with businessmen, politicians and movie stars.

The gangsters ran speakeasies and **protection rackets**. They were involved in prostitution and selling drugs. In Chicago 227 gangsters were murdered in four years without anyone being convicted. In one day in 1929, in the St. Valentine's Day massacre, Al Capone's men machine gunned members of the gang run by Capone's rival, 'Bugs' Moran.

The Wall Street Crash, 1929

Prices began to fall quickly as people tried to sell their shares.

1. On Thursday 24 October, later known as Black Thursday, nearly 13 million shares were sold.
2. A group of bankers spent nearly \$250,000,000 buying shares. They hoped people would buy rather than sell shares. The tactic seemed to work, and share prices stopped falling.
3. However, on Monday 28 October, there was more panic, and over 9 million shares were sold at falling prices.
4. Finally, on Tuesday 29 October, people sold over 16 million shares for whatever price they could get. As a result, prices fell. Shareholders lost a total of \$8 billion on that day alone.

Prices of some US shares in 1929:

Company	3 Sept	13 Nov
Anaconda Copper	\$132	\$70
Woolworths	\$100	\$52

Effects of Wall Street Crash

Although Tuesday was the worst day on the stock market, share prices continued to fall for the next few weeks. Finally they stopped falling in mid-November.

Confidence in the American economy was destroyed. Many Americans had lost all their money in the Wall Street Crash. Instead of a 'cycle of prosperity', the USA now became trapped in a 'cycle of depression'.

Banks suffered a lot in the crash. Many had invested their customer money in shares. There was a 'run' on the banks (that means, people rushed to withdraw their savings). The banks began to run out of money. In 1929 alone, nearly 700 banks collapsed.

To try and recover some of their money, banks began to ask for their loans back from companies and the ordinary people who had borrowed money from them. However, the people did not have this money. More companies closed, and some people had to sell their homes and possessions.

During the worst period of the Great Depression (1929-1933), more than 100,000 businesses shut down.

Bust - American's experiences of the depression and the New Deal - 1930s

President Hoover's Response to the Great Depression

"Prosperity is just around the corner." President Hoover, 1932.

- Hoover thought the depression would not last long.
- Hoover did the following to try to get America out of the Depression:

1930/1 - Cut taxes to try to increase spending.

Set up the Reconstruction Finance Company to try to stop banks from going bankrupt.

- It was too little too late. People said "In Hoover we trusted and now we are busted." Hoover became very unpopular as many Americans blamed him for the Depression.
- Hoover lost the Presidential Election of 1932 by a large margin to his opponent the Democrat Franklin D Roosevelt, who promised a 'New Deal' for the American people.

President Roosevelt and the New Deal

What was the New Deal?

Roosevelt planned to use the THE FULL POWER OF THE GOVERNMENT to get the USA out of depression. His priorities were:-

- Getting America back to work
- Protecting their savings
- Providing help for the sick, old and unemployed
- Getting American industry and agriculture back on their feet

PROBLEM - Loss of confidence in the banks

SOLUTION

Emergency Banking Act

Roosevelt ordered all the banks to close and remain closed until government officials had inspected them. A few days later, 5,000 trustworthy banks were allowed to reopen

PROBLEM - Helping the poor and unemployed

SOLUTION

- (i) The Federal Emergency Relief Administration
A sum of \$500 million was spent on soup kitchens, blankets, employment schemes and nursery schools.
- (ii) The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)

Gave jobs to unemployed young men on environmental projects in national parks.

- (iii) The Public Works Administration (PWA)
Created jobs on public work schemes such as building schools, roads, dams, bridges and airports.

PROBLEM - Helping America's Farmers

SOLUTION

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA)

Gave government money to farmers to produce less. This forced up prices and therefore farmers profits. The AAA did not help farm workers who were put out of work.

PROBLEM - Helping American Industry and Workers

SOLUTION

The National Recovery Administration (NRA)

Improved working conditions, outlawed child labour and set out fair wages for workers. Firms who joined the scheme could display the 'blue eagle' as a symbol of presidential approval.

PROBLEM - The Tennessee Valley

SOLUTION

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)

Built a series of dams on the Tennessee River, which controlled its flow and allowed the land to be farmed. Dams also created electricity and created thousands of jobs.

More New Deal Measures

The Wagner Act

Forced all employers to allow trade unions and allow them to negotiate with employers for better pay and conditions.

The Social Security Act

Introduced state pensions for the elderly and widows. Also provided help for the sick and disabled and set up a scheme for unemployment insurance.

Who was Opposed to Roosevelt's New Deal and Why?

The Supreme Court

Declared some aspects of the New Deal UNCONSTITUTIONAL (against the American Constitution). The Supreme Court said President Roosevelt was acting beyond his powers and interfering in areas which were the responsibility of the individual states. The NRA for example was declared unconstitutional.

Republicans / Businessmen

They argued that the New Deal was doing too much. They saw Roosevelt as a dictator trying to control too many aspects of American lives.

Radical Politicians

Some democrats argued that Roosevelt was not doing enough to help the poor and unemployed. HUEY LONG and his 'SHARE OUR WEALTH' movement wanted to limit personal wealth to a maximum of \$3 million. He was assassinated in 1935.

POPULAR CULTURE IN THE 1930s

Many Americans lives changed substantially in the 1930s of leisure.

a) CAR OWNERSHIP

Allowed people to travel to cinemas, sports venues and shopping centres.

b) RADIOS

By 1939, 28 million homes had a radio. Comedians like Jack Benny became famous and radio stations promoted soap operas.

c) WATCHING SPORT

Huge numbers travelled to watch baseball teams. Basketball teams like the Harlem Globetrotters became famous. People listened to sport on their radios.

d) CINEMA

This was the biggest single influence on American life in the 1930s. Talkies replaced the silent movies. Movie stars like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers made films which reflected the conditions of the time.

Was Roosevelt's New Deal a Success?

Yes

- The New Deal created millions of jobs and unemployment did go down
- The New Deal solved the banking crisis
- Projects such as the TVA brought work and improved the standard of living in deprived parts of the USA
- The New Deal introduced a Social Security System into the USA for the first time which helped the old, the unemployed and the disabled.
- Working conditions were improved by the NRA and other agencies. Trade Unions became legal

No

- Unemployment remained high throughout the 1930s. There were still 6 million unemployed in 1941 and only the USA's entry into the war brought an end to unemployment
- The US economy took longer to recover than that of most European countries
- Unions were treated with suspicion by employers and many strikes were broken up with brutal violence in the 1930s

The Impact of the Second World War

Lend Lease

The USA loaned war material to its allies on the understanding that it would be returned at the end of the war. A total of \$50.1 billion worth of materials were shipped. The majority of the contracts for the materials were placed with US firms which stimulated the economy.

Wartime Production

By 1944, the USA was producing almost half of the weapons being made in the world.

Economic Recovery

The USA emerged economically stronger from the war.

- More than half a million new businesses started up during the war
- The war effort ended unemployment
- Farmers did better and the USA exported food to help its allies.
- As demand for workers increased, so did wages.

Social Developments

a) African Americans

Over 1 million African American soldiers joined the armed forces where they worked alongside white Americans. This increased expectations that changes would happen concerning racial segregation at home.

African Americans also played an important role at home. By the end of 1944 about 2 million were working in factories producing war materials. Many moved north, where they saw that racial segregation was not the norm. Therefore expectations of changes occurring after the war rose. Membership of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) rose from 50,000 to nearly half a million.

b) Changes for Women

During the war, many women entered the workforce for the first time. Many doing difficult and skilled jobs in the munitions industries. Many women in these jobs were earning higher wages than they had done before and were not willing to go back to their pre-war lives. The percentage of women working went up from 35% in 1941 to 50% in 1945.

Many men expected women to go back to their pre-war role when the war ended. This would cause tension after 1945.

Post-War America

American Society and the Economy after 1945

In the period from 1945 to 1970, massive changes took place in American society. The economy grew rapidly. Many Americans experienced a comfortable lifestyle. Pop music and television developed rapidly, yet there were tensions over fears of communist influence and over the inequalities suffered by African Americans.

Consumerism and Causes of Prosperity

Rapid economic growth provided most middle class white Americans with a comfortable lifestyle. During the 1950s, America was producing nearly half the world's goods. The USA had suffered no mainland bomb damage during the war, unlike all its industrial competitors.

The American Dream

Many wealthy white Americans moved out of the old city centres to new suburban areas. Many modern conveniences became expected as the norm - refrigerators, washing machines and televisions.

In the 1960s the living standard of the average American was three times that of the average British person. Shopping became a popular recreational activity.

Hire purchase (paying for something over months or years) became the normal way to buy as people got used to living on credit rather than saving up.

Popular Culture

Popular culture became dominated by TELEVISION, RADIO and CINEMA.

- **TEENAGERS** - American youth of the 1940s and 1950s had more leisure time and more spending money than youths in previous generations. As a result they began to assume their own styles and culture.
By the 1950s 'teenagers' came to be associated with rebellion as youth were seen to act against parents and society by setting up their own alternative standards. Teenage rebels were depicted at the cinema by movie stars such as Marlon Brando and James Dean.
- **ROCK AND ROLL** - Teenage rebellion presented itself in the rock and roll music of the 1950s. Singers like Elvis Presley shocked parents with his movements but teenagers bought his albums in their thousands.
- **TELEVISION** - Television ownership increased rapidly in the 1950s. Television was dominated by commercials all trying to encourage Americans to spend. Most of the programmes were game shows, sit-coms and soap operas.

McCarthyism

After 1945, Americans fear of communism intensified, especially after China fell to communism in 1949. Many Americans felt their way of life was under threat. These fears turned inwards as Americans began to suspect anyone who did not display the so-called American values of patriotism, freedom and enterprise, of being communist sympathisers.

The US Congress set up the House Committee of Un-American Activities to investigate communist involvement in the government, education and the film industry. Many people were sacked as 'security risks' senator Joe McCarthy started a campaign against possible communists using half-truths, rumours and lies. McCarthy claimed many communist sympathisers were working in the government. Many were put on trial and found guilty without much proof.

A separate sub-committee was set up to investigate McCarthy and these hearings were televised. They showed McCarthy to be a bully and he was eventually removed from his position.

Racial Tension and Developments in the Civil Rights Campaign in the 1950s and 1960s

Segregation Laws and Racial Prejudice

- Many southern states enforced the so-called 'Jim Crow' laws. These laws segregated the use of everyday facilities such as parks, buses and schools.
- In some states, various practices were used to prevent black people from voting, most commonly violence. For example in Mississippi, African Americans who tried to vote faced intimidation and even lynching.
- Police officers were often sympathetic to violence against African Americans and even took part in it.
- The best schools and universities were often closed to black people.

The Struggle for Equal Education: A Legal Challenge

For decades it had been legal in the USA for states to have separate schools for black and white children. These schools were supposed to be equal, but in reality schools for black children were almost always less well equipped.

Brown v Board of Education of Topeka, 1954

The NAACP brought against the Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas. The case was about an African American girl called Linda Brown, who had to travel several kilometres to get to school, rather than attend a whites-only school nearby. The case went to the Supreme Court.

In May 1954, Chief Justice, Earl Warren, announced that segregated education was UNCONSTITUTIONAL and ordered all southern states to set up integrated schools with all deliberate speed.

Little Rock, Arkansas, 1957

Integration was met with great resistance in some states. For example, 3 years after Justice Warren's ruling, Arkansas had still failed to integrate its schools. In 1957 the Supreme Court ordered the Governor of Arkansas to let nine African American students attend a white high school in Little Rock, Arkansas. The Governor ordered his state troops to prevent the African American students from attending the school. The Governor only backed down when President Eisenhower sent Federal troops to protect the students and make sure they could join the school.

Martin Luther King and Peaceful Protests

The Montgomery Bus Boycott

In December 1955, Rosa Parks sat on a bus on her way home from work in Montgomery, Alabama. The bus was full and when a white man boarded, the driver ordered Parks to stand up. She refused and was arrested.

Parks was in the NAACP. She did this on purpose, after a number of incidents of rudeness and discrimination against blacks on Montgomery's buses.

Martin Luther King was the leader of the black people of Montgomery and they decided to boycott the buses. Thousands of black people walked to work, while the city's 210 African American taxi drivers offered seats for the cost of the bus fare. A car-pool of supporters of the boycott was also organised to get black people to work. The boycott lasted 381 days.

King and his supporters called themselves the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). The MIA also hired NAACP lawyers to take the case to the Supreme Court.

The MIA deliberately tried to only get small reforms - they wanted black drivers on black routes, and they wanted white bus drivers to be polite to black passengers. The MIA did not even challenge the idea of segregation, asking only that seats on city buses be allocated on a first-come-first-served basis, with black people filling up seats from the rear, white passengers from the front.

The local White Citizens Council didn't like to MIA's proposals. Its membership doubled.

But the boycott was losing the bus company lots of money, and local businesses were losing money too (local shopkeepers lost \$1 million).

On 13 November the city chiefs got the car-pool stopped in the courts. The decision would have been the defeat of the boycott, but it was pointless because on the same day, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation on buses was unconstitutional.

Rosa Parks became an inspiration to the Civil Rights Movement. It demonstrated that when black Americans united, they could succeed.

The success of the boycott increased black confidence - when the KKK, robed and hooded, drove through the black areas of town blacks came out and waved at them. But the success was limited. Everything else in Montgomery was still segregated. And the boycott had revealed the racism and the determination of some whites. Parks and her husband lost their jobs. She received death threats and had to move to Detroit.

How Much Progress Has Been Made by 1960?

By 1960 the Civil Rights Movement had begun to weaken the legal idea of segregation. The movement had its heroes. In a TV interview in 1967, Martin Luther King said that he believed that the 1950s had created 'the new Negro who was happy to stand up for what he feels is right and what he feels he deserves.

But there was still no mass movement of black Americans, who still lacked the most basic civil rights (including the vote). When Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) tried to organise the registration of three millions new black voters in a 1957 Act, it managed to add only 160,000 more names.

Meanwhile, the movement had provoked a lot of angry whites. Voter's lists had black voters deleted off them and a number of southern states outlawed the NAACP.

Living Standards for African Americans

Living standards for African Americans in general were improving - where 87 per cent of black Americans lived below the poverty line in 1940, that figure had fallen to 41 per cent by 1959.

However, the overall figure hid many problems. Many black Americans had moved from the southern states to the northern states in search of work. There, they earned more but paid high rents to live in appalling and overcrowded 'ghettos', surrounded by violence and crime.

Black workers were generally trapped in low-skilled, low-paying jobs.

The average black income in 1957 was only 57 per cent that of a white worker. Moreover, unemployment amongst black Americans, at 11 per cent, was double that of whites.

By the end of the 1950s, there had been little change in the everyday experience of blacks, who were still segregated and discriminated against socially, economically and politically.

Martin Luther King

In 1954 Martin Luther King was the young Baptist minister of a 'rich folks' church in Montgomery, Alabama. His vision was to follow the example of Ghandi, who led a non-violent campaign of passive resistance against British rule in India in the 1940s. King first came to public notice in 1955 when - as a leader of the Montgomery Bus Boycott - his house was bombed, but he declared: 'We must meet violence with non-violence'.

Martin Luther King rose to be the hero of the Civil Rights Movement, but it is worth remembering that in the 1960s there were a number of different black organisations campaigning for black rights.

The NAACP had already achieved a number of legal successes by the time King started his campaign. Indeed, after King's success in the Montgomery bus boycott, the NAACP leader Marshall simply remarked: 'All that walking for nothing'. The boycott had not secured the end of segregation on Montgomery's buses, whereas the NAACP had through the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, CORE had been campaigning since the Second World War. King founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957. But they SCLC was poorly organised.

The Sit-ins

The first Civil Rights successes did not come from the SCLC at all. In 1960, in Greensboro, North Carolina, four college students went to the local Woolworths store and sat down at the white section on the lunch counter. The first day they were simply ignored, so they returned the following day with 30 students, this time they got in the local newspaper. Next day there were 66 black students, and after a week of growing troubles and threats the store was forced to close.

The protestors were humiliated and assaulted. Not all of them managed to fight back.

In fact after Greensboro the NAACP managed to register large numbers of black voters, and had even got black councillors elected. But as the minority on the council, the black councillors found that they couldn't change segregation in Greensboro, their presence on the Council simply made it look as though they supported the Council's segregation policies.

The sit-ins were therefore a new tactic for civil rights - they were 'direct action' to challenge segregation. At the end of the sit-ins, the Student Coordinating Committee, or SNCC ('Snick') was formed.

King had nothing to do with organising the sit-ins, and he disapproved - he was only persuaded to join one in October 1960.

The students had chosen to highlight racial inequality because 1960 was a presidential election year. One of the reasons John F. Kennedy won a close vote was his protest about the imprisonment of Martin Luther King. Kennedy had won over large amounts of black voters.

Freedom Rides

In May 1961 James Farmer of CORE organised the Freedom Rides during which young blacks tried to travel on segregated interstate buses. The riders knew they would be attacked. When a first bus reached Alabama, the tyres were slashed and the bus set on fire; the mob tried to hold the doors shut so that the passengers would be burned alive. When a second bus reached Birmingham, Alabama, the police and KKK attacked the riders with clubs and chains as they left the bus. White Freedom Riders were especially badly beaten by the mob.

In all, there were 60 Freedom Rides, involving 450 very brave people.

Most were beaten and / or imprisoned. While they waited for some connections, the Freedom Riders would also go and break the rules in segregated restaurants and hotels.

Many SNCC students participated in the rides which King supported. CORE, SNCC and SCLC all ignored the government's request to stop the Freedom Rides because they were causing civil unrest, and in the end Attorney General Robert Kennedy had to enforce the Supreme Court's decision that segregation on interstate travel was illegal.

The Washington Freedom March

In August 1963 King decided to make use of his support. He organised a march that drew a quarter of a million people (including at least 75,000 white supporters), all of whom heard his brilliant 'I have a Dream' speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. Watched by millions live on television, to the cheers of the crowd, he finished by looking forward to the time when black Americans, in the words of the Negro spiritual, would be 'Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'

By the end of 1963, King had become the leader of the Civil Rights Movement. He had proved he could use the media and was the most famous civil rights campaigner. Furthermore the government supported him.

Increasing Radicalisation

Black American movements which were much more radical and violent emerged during the 1960s.

The Ghetto Riots

Martin Luther King and his civil rights successes in the south didn't matter to blacks living in the poor area of American cities - where there was lots of poverty and unemployment. In Chicago's ghettos, some 70 per cent of black youths were unemployed. Poor housing led to violence and crime. Only 32 per cent of ghetto children finished high school.

In 1965, a clumsy and brutal attempt by police to arrest a black drunk-driver led to riots in the Watts area of Los Angeles. Between 1964 and 1968, there were 238 riots in more than 200 US cities. These riots resulted in 25 deaths (many from police shootings) and billions of dollars worth of damage.

The middle-class campaigners of the SCLC and the NAACP didn't know about this ghetto world. But black activists were working in the ghettos. After 1964, CORE workers rented '**freedom houses**' in the northern ghettos, from which they distributed information on education, employment, health and housing.

Nation of Islam and Malcolm X

Nation of Islam was a Black Muslim movement formed in 1930. Its solution to the problems of black Americans was either a return to Africa or a separate black American state in the southern USA. King labelled them 'a hate group', and NAACP leader Thurgood Marshall called them 'a bunch of thugs' but they had about 250,000 members by 1970 - the most famous being Muhammad Ali, the world champion boxer, and Malcolm X, the black activist.

Malcolm X was an aggressive man who joined the NoI while in prison for drug-dealing. He presented himself as 'the alternative Dr King'. He rejected King's non-violence and argued that white policies often left black Americans with no alternative but violence.

In 1964 Malcolm X was suspended from NoI after appearing to welcome the assassination of President Kennedy. His New York home was fire-bombed in 1964, and in 1965 he was assassinated by a NoI gunman.

Malcolm X:

- Became a role model for angry young blacks
- Forced America's black leaders to re-focus their attention away from civil and legal rights instead on social and economical conditions.
- Introduced the idea of violence as a legitimate tactic.

Black Power

In 1966 SNCC chose Carmichael as its leader and got rid of all white members. Carmichael rejected non-violence. He brought the phrase 'Black Power' to the public's attention when he shouted it at a speech in Greenwood, Mississippi after the Meredith March. Next year, Carmichael was succeeded by H 'Rap' Brown, who encouraged poor black people to seize white shops and caused a number of ghetto riots later that year.

Meanwhile, in 1966 the radical McKissick took over CORE, which expelled its white members in 1968. McKissick too, rejected non-violence.

The most famous example of Black Power came during the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, when medal winners Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists in a Black Power salute.

The athletes were members of the Olympics Project for Human Rights, and organisation founded in 1967 to protest against discrimination against blacks in sports.

Towards a Civil Rights Act

Partly as a result of their respect for Martin Luther King, President Kennedy and his brother Roberts became committed to civil rights.

- In 1962 the government introduced an act to reduce discrimination in housing.
- Also in 1962, Robert Kennedy sent 500 federal marshals to help James Meredith, a black student, enrol at the University of Mississippi.
- In 1963, federal marshals forced state governor George Wallace to desegregate the University of Alabama.

Finally, the Kennedy's introduced the Civil Rights Bill, which became law after President Kennedy's assassination.

The Civil Rights Act, 1964

The civil Rights Act 1964 was passed by the new president, Lyndon Johnson, was designed to bring an 'end to poverty and injustice'. The act made racial segregation in schools, public places and employment illegal and set up an Equal Opportunities Commission to enforce this ruling.

In 1964, after the murder of two young Civil Rights workers, Johnson ordered the FBI to hunt down the killers: 19 KKK men, including a sheriff and deputy, were arrested. Next year, Johnson passed the Voting Rights Act (1965), which ended the literacy tests and other tricks by which whites had stopped blacks registering to vote - now every person had a vote, as of right. In 1965 an Education Act provided funding for public schools; black students gained lots and the number of black pupils leaving with high school diplomas increased.

America and the Great Society

President Johnson's Great Society laid out his big ideas to tackle problems of employment, bad housing and poor medical care.

The Economic Opportunity Act 1964

Provided training to disadvantaged youths aged 16-21.

Medicare and Medicaid

This provided medical insurance for the over 65s and hospital care for the poor.

The Development Act 1964

Money was provided for replacing inner-city slums with new homes.

The Development and Impact of Feminist Movements

The 1960s was a decade for a change in attitudes towards women running parallel with the civil rights movement. The publication of 'The Feminine Mystique' by Betty Friedan in 1963 is seen by many as the starting point of the feminist movement. She argued that for middle-class women the home had become a prison and most women wished to break out of this limited environment.

- In 1966 a group of women including Betty Friedan set up the National Organisation for Women (NOW)
- An Equal Pay Act of 1963 established the principle of equal pay for women doing the same job as men, but there were many exceptions. Some of these were removed in 1972 in the Equal Rights Amendment Act.
- Roe v Wade
This momentous Supreme Court decision made abortion legal. Abortion was declared to be a fundamental right for women under the US constitution.
- The Supreme Court ruled in 1972 that contraception should be legally available to unmarried couples on the same terms as married couples.
- In 1972 colleges were required to ensure that opportunities for women were equal to those of men.