

# Paper 5: The History of the USA c. 1840–1968

This paper focuses on key developments that transformed the USA from an isolated agrarian society to the world's leading superpower in terms of economic strength, military power, political and diplomatic influence, and cultural and social impact on other nations and peoples.

The themes are:

- Theme 1 Westward Expansion and the Taming of the West, c. 1840–96
- Theme 2 Civil War and Reconstruction, 1861–77
- Theme 3 The Impact of Economic Expansion, 1865–1917
- Theme 4 Civil Rights, 1895–1968
- Theme 5 Boom and Bust, 1920–41
- Theme 6 The USA's Rise as a World Power, 1890–1945
- Theme 7 Social Developments, 1945–68

## Source-based study: The Road to Secession and Civil War, 1846–61

This topic focuses on the reasons for the breakdown of consensus regarding the American Union, between the end of the Mexican War and the outbreak of Civil War in April 1861. Candidates must study the protracted arguments as to whether slavery should be allowed to expand into the new territories acquired by the USA, and understand why this was such an intractable problem. They need to be familiar with the unsuccessful attempts to find a stable basis for compromise. They also need to look at the shifting political alignments of the period, and the debate on whether states were entitled to

Secede from the United States.

Particular attention should be paid to:

- The evolving views of the leading political figures of the period, such as Cobb, Calhoun, Douglas, Seward and Lincoln
- The key crises of 1848–50 and 1860–1
- Differing historiographical interpretations of the sectional conflict.

## Essay topics

Seven essay questions will be set, one on each of the themes:

### **Theme 1: Westward Expansion and the Taming of the West, c. 1840–96**

- The doctrine of 'Manifest Destiny'
- The annexation of Texas, the Mexican War and its consequences
- The Mormons and Utah
- The Oregon Question
- The railroads and their significance
- The displacement of Native American nations
- The Gold Rush of 1849 and Californian statehood
- The 1850 compromise, the Kansas-Nebraska question
- The myth of the 'Wild West'
- Cattlemen and farmers, the mining boom, the destruction of the Plains Indians
- Closing of the frontier and Turner's Frontier Thesis

### **Theme 2: Civil War and Reconstruction, 1861–77**

- (a) The Civil War: strengths and weaknesses of the Union and the Confederacy

- Lincoln and Davis as war leaders
  - The border states' key decisions
  - Different strategies of the armies, key campaigns and battles
  - European attitudes and diplomatic initiatives
  - The Emancipation Proclamation and its effects
  - Weaknesses of the Confederate political system
  - Wartime politics in the Union: civil liberties, the 1864 election
  - Grant and Lee as generals
  - Why did the South lose?
- (b) Reconstruction: legacies of the war; devastated South and booming North
- Lincoln's programme for rebels
  - Johnson's Reconstruction programme, Congressional opposition
  - Radical Congressional Reconstruction, impeachment of Johnson
  - Effects of Reconstruction on freedmen, and on the White South
  - Grant's administrations, changing emphasis
  - Erosion of black rights, reinstatement of white supremacy
  - Compromise of 1877 and the end of Reconstruction
  - How far did Reconstruction advance the position of the former slaves?

### **Theme 3: The Impact of Economic Expansion, 1865–1917**

- Reasons for the expansion of US industry and commerce after the Civil War
- Effects of mass immigration
- Effects of technical innovations
- The impact of railroad expansion
- Steel, oil and finance
- Trusts and monopolies, attempts at regulation
- Cult of the business ethic
- Agrarian revolt and populism, the rise of trade unions and increasing industrial conflict
- Ford and the production line revolution
- The Progressive Era and its impact on business.

### **Theme 4: Civil Rights, 1895–1968**

- The position of African-Americans in 1900, the contrasting strategies of Booker T Washington and W E B du Bois, the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP)
- World War I and black Americans
- Revival of the Ku Klux Klan and lynching in the 1920s
- The persistence of denial of civil rights in the South and discrimination in the North
- The New Deal and civil rights
- World War II and black Americans
- The end of racial discrimination in schools, the Brown case and the Supreme Court
- The rise to prominence of Martin Luther King through the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the tactic of non-violent protest against segregation
- Militant approach of other groups: Malcolm X and the Black Muslims, Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver and the Black Panthers
- The Civil Rights Act (1964) and the 24th Amendment
- Assassinations of King and Malcolm X
- The 1967 riots and Johnson's civil rights policies

- The civil rights of Native Americans
- Assessment of the extent of gains made in civil rights by the end of the 1960s.

#### **Theme 5: Boom and Bust, 1920–41**

- Post-war reaction against internationalism and progressivism, the election of Harding and the cult of 'normalcy'
- Prohibition and its consequences
- Corruption scandals
- The Coolidge presidency and the business boom
- American society in the 'Jazz Age'
- The origins of Depression, the Wall Street crash, Hoover's failed policies, FDR and the First New Deal, the second phase of the New Deal
- American society in the Depression
- Opposition to the New Deal, the Supreme Court
- The New Deal – an evaluation.

#### **Theme 6: The USA's Rise as a World Power, 1890–1945**

- The rise of American imperialism and its causes, war with Spain and its consequences, Far Eastern policy and the acquisition of the Panama Canal
- Roosevelt's policies in the Western hemisphere
- The policy of neutrality and the First World War, the failed peace efforts of Wilson, reasons for entry of the USA into the war
- The contribution of the USA to victory
- Wilson's role in peacemaking, rejection of the Versailles Settlement by the Senate
- Return to partial isolationism
- War debts and reparations
- The Washington Conference and the Kellogg Pact
- FDR's 'Good Neighbour' policy, and policy in the Far East
- New Deal diplomacy
- US neutrality in World War II, Lend-Lease
- Pearl Harbor, war with Germany and Japan
- The US contribution to the war effort
- Conferences at Yalta and Potsdam
- The San Francisco Conference, founding of the United Nations
- Assessment of the position of the USA in the world by 1945.

#### **Theme 7: Social Developments, 1945–68**

- The effects of the war
- Population growth, changes in demographic structure and mobility
- The decay of the cities and the urban crisis
- The social consequences of technological change and economic growth
- The role of religion
- Expansion of higher education, student radicalism
- Revolution in lifestyles in the 1960s: changes in the workplace, the roles of women, families
- Developments in mass culture: film, literature, the TV age, the growing influence of the mass media.