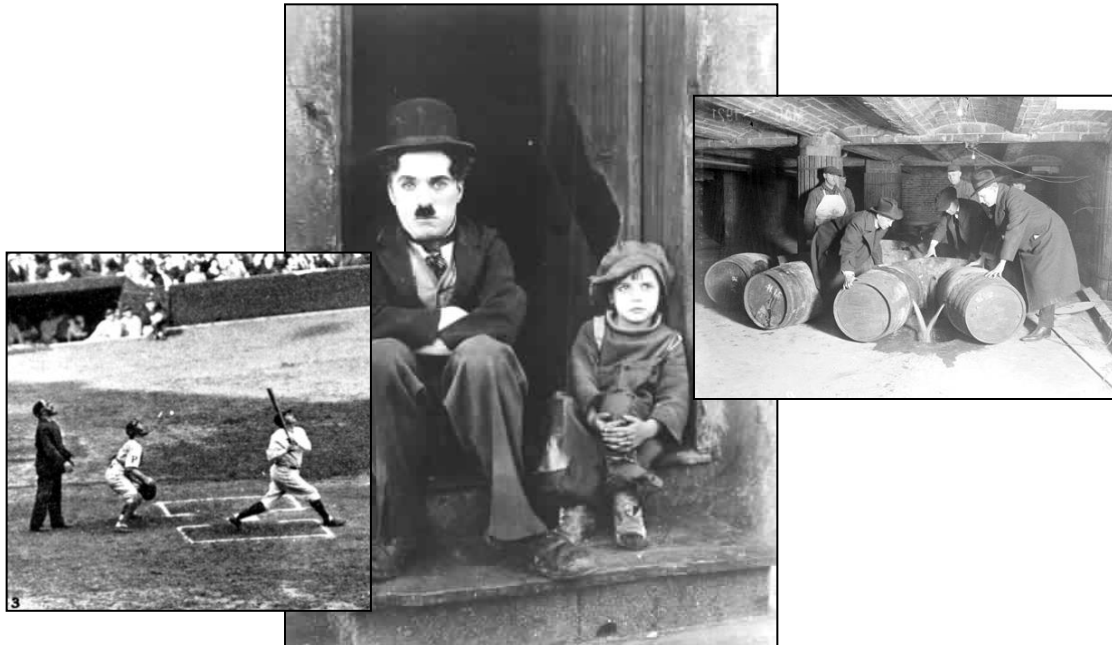


USA 1890–1945

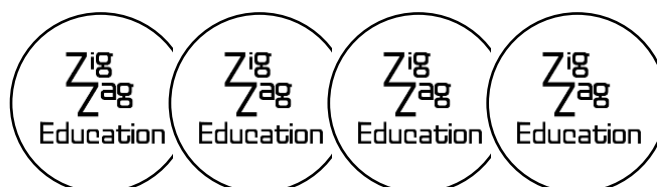
The USA c1920–1929

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Teacher's Introduction

This resource has been produced with the new AS Level modules in mind. It specifically matches the specifications for the AQA Examination Unit HIS1M: The USA 1890–1945. However, it also has relevance for any specification covering this period of American history.

The resource is aimed at GCE AS Level students, and includes a number of tasks to reinforce learning or to challenge student perceptions. It can be used as a classroom resource, a basis for teacher-led lessons or as an independent learning tool for students to use at home or in free periods.

How to use each Chapter

Each chapter of this resource can be used together as a complete course or discreetly as a stand-alone episode dealing with certain key issues and questions about the USA c1920–1929.

There are several ways the tasks can be approached:

- Work through each section of the chapter, completing each task in turn
- Introduce each chapter by means of digital presentation, film or other method before handing out the chapter to the students and using the tasks as given
- Using the tasks as a basis for discussion and debate
- Using the tasks as reinforcement or support activities

All tasks are related to the information that directly precedes them; however, some will benefit from additional research or referral to other sections of the resource.

The tasks can be ignored in favour of other teacher-guided activities, and the resource used for background information, additional reading or revision.

Finally the resource and its tasks can be used for homework and/or research, and can also be used to set work for those times when a teacher is absent.

Chapter One: Domestic Policy

What was the impact of the First World War on the USA?

The United States formally declared war on Germany in April 1917, but as early as August 1916 the US Congress had established a Council of National Defence. In January the US Shipping Board was created with the remit of increasing shipbuilding in the United States. Although the USA had hoped to keep out of the First World War, the fact was that preparations for war had been made in the USA well before the formal declaration.

Once the decision had been taken to declare war, the biggest problem facing the USA was that of raising an army. There had been no military conscription in the USA, and in April 1917 the American Army numbered a meagre 120,000 men. In May 1917 the Selective Service Act was passed, which introduced conscription. This proved remarkably effective and by the end of the war in November 1918 some 24 million men had been registered to join the armed forces, with three million called up to fight.

Domestically there was a need to ensure that the economy was able to meet the needs of the war effort, thus the War Industries Board was set up in 1917 to organise purchases for the US armed forces. A Food Administration was also created in 1917 to make sure not only that there was enough food for American needs but also that there was sufficient surplus food that could be shipped to Britain. Under the leadership of Herbert Hoover, Americans were urged not to waste food and he was responsible for such concepts as *'Meatless Mondays'* and *'Porkless Thursdays'*.

The war also affected civil liberties in the USA. The Committee on Public Information was created on 14th April 1917, which began a propaganda war against Germany and its allies. Two further acts – the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918 – banned any criticism of the war effort. As a result several more left-wing Americans were put into prison. The effect of the new legislation was to significantly increase the power of the federal government over the American people.

The war also had its consequences. Although new government legislation served to silence much criticism, there remained some significant opposition to the war effort. Much of this came from the immigrant minorities, notably Italian-Americans. This led to a reaction against *'aliens'* within the USA who were deemed to be unpatriotic and *'un-American'*. Several more radical and left-wing immigrants were to suffer as a result of the backlash that came immediately after the war.

Financially the war cost \$35.5 billion, \$11.2 billion of which took the form of loans to America's European allies. Of the American men who served on the Western Front, some 100,000 lost their lives. As the men joined the army, their jobs, as had been the case in Europe, were taken on by women. This had the effect of changing attitudes towards women and shortly after the war the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution was passed, which gave American women the right to vote in federal elections for the first time.

Finally the war had boosted the American economy and American trade. However, the end of the war led to the closure of factories that had produced goods for the war effort, such as weapons factories. At the same time peace meant that Europeans returned to their own peacetime economic activities. Demand for American products, such as food, which had been high when the Europeans were unable to grow enough for their own needs, now collapsed. Unemployment became a problem, made worse by the return of the soldiers, for whom there was no work.

Many Americans were to suffer hardship, and several looked around for a scapegoat. White Americans were not slow to come to the conclusion that they were being deprived of work or forced to accept low wages because of the large numbers of cheap immigrant workers. Attitudes towards immigration were hardening in the United States.

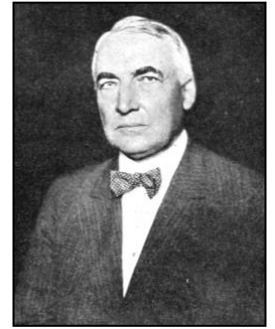
Task

1. How did the following impact upon American life?
 - The Council of National Defence
 - The Selective Service Act
 - The War Industries Board
 - The Food Administration
 - The Committee on Public Information
 - The Espionage and the Sedition Acts
2. How did the First World War affect the following?
 - Immigrants in the United States
 - US finances
 - Attitudes towards women
 - Trade and Employment

Why was the Republican Party dominant in the 1920s?

By 1920 the zeal and progressivism of Woodrow Wilson had become unfashionable, and his political rivals, the Republicans, were convinced that Americans were ready for change. Wartime controls had been abolished and there was a return to a more traditional American attitude of *laissez-faire*.

The Republicans believed very much in the principle of '*small*' government, which allowed individuals and businesses to prosper by means of their own efforts, free from government interference. They chose the conservative Warren Harding (*right*) as their presidential candidate, who campaigned against the Democrat James Cox.



Cox tried to make foreign affairs the key issue of the election, but the voters were far more concerned about rising prices, industrial disputes and economic problems. They tended to blame the previous Democratic regime for these problems. By contrast Harding argued that America needed "*no heroics but healing, no nostrums but normalcy*". It was a message that proved popular with the voters – Harding won the 1920 election with 61% of the vote – more than any previous presidential candidate.

Harding had an amiable personality, but it was soon clear that many complex issues were beyond his understanding. He did appoint some very able men to key positions, such as Herbert Hoover as Secretary of Commerce, but he also granted important positions in his administration to his own cronies – the so-called Ohio Gang.

Harding was very much in favour of keeping government intervention in economic matters to an absolute minimum. He repealed the wartime taxes and returned instead to the traditional Republican economic policy of high tariffs. He did not enforce the pre-war anti-trust legislation, and he sided with the employers in any industrial dispute. It was during his time in office that the Supreme Court ruled that trade unions were not immune from prosecution in respect of practices such as mass picketing. It also decreed that trade unions were liable for damages caused by a strike.

Unfortunately for the president it emerged in 1923 that there was widespread corruption within his government. The man in charge of the Veterans' Bureau was found to have '*misappropriated*' or at least wasted some \$250 million, whilst the Alien Property Custodian had accepted bribes. Both men were sent to prison.



The most sensational scandal concerned the lease to private companies and individuals of government land that had been set aside earlier for use by the US Navy. The Secretary of the Interior Fall was sent to prison for a year for this particular act of corruption – thus becoming the first cabinet member in US history to go to prison for crimes committed in office. Harding was not himself implicated in any corrupt activity; however, in 1923 he suddenly died. Power fell to the Vice President, Calvin Coolidge (*left*).

Coolidge was honest and essentially incorruptible. He had a simple, *laissez-faire* attitude, stating that "*the business of America is business*". He tended to sleep much and say little, so much so that when he died in 1933, writer Dorothy Parker glibly stated: "*How can they tell?*" However, to most Americans, Coolidge's presence in the White House was reassuring – he was the face of traditional values in a world of change, and he won the 1924 election comfortably. His victory led to an extension of Republican business principles – low taxes, low interest rates, and low government expenditure. For much of the 1920s it appeared that the Republicans were right as the American economy went from strength to strength.

Coolidge refused to stand for election in 1928, concerned about his health, so the Republicans selected Herbert Hoover (*right*) as their candidate. Hoover was a self-made man who had become a millionaire before the age of 40. He believed that anyone could do the same if they worked hard and were allowed to reap the benefits of their efforts. It was an attitude that supported what has been called '*rugged individualism*', which emphasised personal liberty, self-reliance and free competition.



Hoover fought the 1928 election on a platform of continued high tariffs, tax reductions and help for the farmers. He took an optimistic view of America's economic performance and claimed that the United States would "*soon be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation*". His opponent was the New York Democrat, Al Smith (*left*), who was a Catholic of Irish descent. Smith was also sympathetic towards business and in many ways his programme differed from Hoover's only in detail and degree.

However, given the prevailing prosperity in the United States, for which the Republicans were given the credit, it was up to Smith to show how the Democrats could improve upon this record. Smith failed to do this, and Hoover was consequently returned to the White House. He was to prove to be the last Republican president until 1953.

Task

Which of the following were the main reasons for Republican success in the 1920s? Explain your thinking.

- A change in the attitude of the American people following the First World War
- A belief in '*small government*'
- The personalities of the presidents in the 1920s
- The reduction in taxation
- High import tariffs
- The Economic Boom
- Rugged Individualism

Why did the USA experience an economic boom in the 1920s?

The economic recession that occurred after the First World War proved to be short-lived and the USA in the 1920s was seen as prosperous and successful. Statistically this viewpoint seems substantiated. For example the Gross National Product of the USA rose from \$73.3 billion in 1920 to \$104.4 billion in 1929, which represented a growth rate of around 2% per year.

At the same time unemployment never rose above 3.7% and inflation never rose above 1%. The average industrial working week was reduced from 47.4 hours in 1920 to 44.2 hours in 1929, and real wages rose by some 13% during the decade. This all meant that Americans had greater purchasing power in the 1920s – a fact also reflected in the statistics. For instance, in 1922 Americans bought some 100,000 radios; in 1929 they bought 350,000, and during the decade the main US corporations saw profits rise by 62%.

There were several reasons for the economic boom of the 1920s in the United States. These included the size and economic wealth of the USA, the impact of the First World War, the entrepreneurial spirit of Americans, the policies of the Republican governments, progress in both technology and industrial techniques, new business methods, and the growth of credit.

1. The Size and Wealth of the USA

A combination of natural growth and immigration meant that by 1920 the population of the United States had reached 106.4 million. By contrast, for example, the British population in 1921 numbered 42 million. This large American population had considerable purchasing power, and businesses could rely on a large domestic market for their products.

Americans had by now also exploited the potential of the Great Plains and had developed an effective infrastructure, notably in the transport network. By the 1920s the nineteenth century railway system had been augmented by roads for the recently invented motor car, and these roads provided links between places where the railways had not always reached.

Finally the United States was rich in natural resources. There were large oil reserves in Texas and Oklahoma and extensive coalfields in Kentucky, West Virginia and Pennsylvania. There was an abundant supply of iron-ore, lead, tin, copper and other metals and timber could be easily provided from the forests of the Pacific North West. The southern states could provide cotton and the Mid West and western states grew copious amounts of food.

This meant that Americans did not have to import raw materials, could produce goods for a large market that wanted the products, and could bring them easily to that market.

2. The Impact of the First World War

The demand for supplies and armaments during the First World War, particularly from America's European allies, so stimulated American industry that by 1918 the USA was the world's largest industrial power. The USA also benefited from the self-destruction of its European rivals. Before 1914 the USA had been challenged industrially by the Germans and the British, but both European states had bankrupted themselves during the fighting and were no longer economic competitors of the United States. The problems faced by the Europeans meant that the United States was leagues ahead of its previous rivals and able to develop its economy more effectively.

3. The Entrepreneurial Spirit of Americans

The Americans were keen inventors – for example, it was they who had come up with the electric light bulb, the phonograph, the sewing machine and the telephone. The '*rugged individualism*' of the time also encouraged hard work and thrift.

The history of American businessmen in the nineteenth century also showed people that the so-called '*American Dream*' was possible – that if you worked hard enough you could be prosperous. It was this promise that had encouraged millions to come to the USA, and these millions provided a large, hard-working source of cheap labour, which in turn contributed to the development of American industrialisation.

4. The Policies of the Republican Governments

Republican government policy in the 1920s helped create the conditions that allowed for an economic boom. This policy was described as '*laissez-faire*', which meant that government did not interfere with business or the economy.

In reality however the government interfered significantly – it went out of its way to aid business. In 1922 Congress passed the Fordney-McCumber Tariff Act, which placed import duties on all manner of foreign produce, including farm products, textiles and chinaware. This tariff had the effect of protecting American manufacturers against foreign competition by making American products cheaper.

Government also cut taxes, which helped American business. In a series of tax cuts between 1921 and 1926 surtax on the rich was reduced from 50% to 20%. This encouraged the rich to invest their extra cash in new and developing industries, allowing them to grow. Tax advantages towards large corporations also encouraged the growth of industry, and this in turn meant that the US Treasury actually gained more money as a result of increased profits.

Finally there was legislation against trade unions. No-strike agreements, also known as '*Yellow Dog contracts*', were upheld by the law courts, which meant that management had greater control over its workforce.

5. Progress in Technology and Industrial Technique

Although motor cars had been produced in the USA since the 1880s, in Detroit, Michigan, an industrial revolution took place. Motor car manufacturer Henry Ford introduced an assembly line that took the work of car assembly to the workers rather than expecting the workers to move to the car. Each worker became responsible for the assembly of just one particular car part, which meant that even unskilled workers could be trained very easily.

The assembly line also meant that the rate of production could be set at a constant rate, which was faster than previous methods of car assembly. This meant that Ford could produce more cars, which meant he could reduce the cost of each car whilst increasing his own profits. By 1926 Ford was able to produce a Model T Ford car every 10 seconds.



Ford assembly Line

Ford workers also benefited from this. Ford introduced the \$5 a day pay rate for car workers, which was significantly above rates offered elsewhere. However, in return the workers were not allowed to join a trade union, and they were expected to obey the company rules on working conditions.

There were significant spin-offs from the growth in the motor car industry. By 1929 the motor industry directly employed 7% of all American industrial workers, paying almost 9% of all industrial wages. Indirectly the industry created thousands of jobs in industries such as steel, rubber, paint, timber and electrics, all of which were needed in the construction of a motor car.

There was also expansion in the petroleum industry, which provided the fuel for the cars, as well as in the tourist industry, roadside advertising and merchandising, garages, car dealerships and various other businesses catering to the car industry. Finally the Federal Highways Act of 1921 also boosted the motor industry and its associated trades. This gave the federal government responsibility for building roads and, during the 1920s, the government built 10,000 miles of road per year on average.

The motor industry is the epitome of the booming American economy during the 1920s, but the new technology and techniques also affected most of the other industries as well, for example, the production of electrical goods such as radios and washing machines.

6. New Business Methods

In the 1920s the Americans developed the concept of business management. The idea was that all aspects of the manufacturing process could be analysed scientifically in order to devise a system that would maximise output.

From this came the growth and development of the large corporation, which was able to benefit from economies of scale and integration. By 1929 the 200 largest corporations controlled 20% of the wealth of the USA and nearly 40% of its business wealth. The corporations were also able to benefit from discount purchasing, and their size meant they were able to indulge in research and development that could produce even better products at even cheaper prices. Finally they were large enough to staff their organisations with specialist workers, and they were wealthy enough to borrow money easily for investment purposes.

The government actually encouraged corporate control of individual industries. Whilst Herbert Hoover was Secretary of Commerce he encouraged the growth of trade associations within an industry. The aim of these associations was to allow firms to benefit from the exchange of information, which would then allow them to standardise manufacturing methods and also to take advantage of the latest technology. Hundreds were created by 1929, though many criticised this development on the grounds that associations tended to act like the pre-war trusts.

The 1920s also saw a rapid growth in advertising and marketing, bringing awareness to the American people of the products available. This was aided by the development of the motor car, the radio and the cinema. The secret was not only to make consumers aware of the available products, but also to persuade them that the product on offer was absolutely vital for their lives (and, of course, infinitely superior to products of rivals and competitors).

7. The Growth of Credit

The development of technology and business techniques meant American manufacturers could produce more goods at a lower unit cost per item. However, this would have meant nothing unless there was a demand for these products. Advertising allowed manufacturers to bring their products to the attention of consumers, but all would count for nothing unless the American people could afford to buy the goods.

Even though the 1920s was a time of increasing real wages for many Americans, some products remained beyond the purchasing capability of many, such as the motor car. This could have brought the boom to an end, because once the demand from those who could afford cars was satisfied, there would be no need to produce more.

Therefore, to extend and stimulate demand, a system of hire purchase was introduced. This allowed consumers to buy goods for a small deposit and then pay off the rest of the price in a series of small instalments for a small rate of interest. Encouraged by advertising, consumers bought a large number of goods via hire purchase, from motor cars to refrigerators. Between 1919 and 1929 the amount of consumer credit, excluding agriculture, grew from \$32 billion to \$60 billion.

Task

Explain how each of the following factors contributed towards an economic boom in the United States during the 1920s:

- The population of the United States
- The development of the infrastructure in the USA
- The natural resources in the USA
- The First World War
- The '*American Dream*'
- Laissez-faire policies
- Republican economic policies
- Yellow Dog contracts
- The assembly line
- Business management
- Large corporations
- Advertising and marketing
- The growth of credit

What were the weaknesses of the American economy in the 1920s?

Although the American economy boomed in the 1920s, there were some significant weaknesses. These included the unequal distribution of income, the international debt situation, falling demand for American products and speculation on the stock market. However, perhaps the weakest sector in the US economy was the agricultural industry.

Farming in the USA

By the early twentieth century the USA had become a society where most people lived in towns and cities. Economically this was a major change because farming had been an extremely important aspect of American culture. The farmers had not only grown the food that was necessary for life itself, but they had also given Americans much of their perceived national character – hard work, self-reliance and the overcoming of adversity through personal endeavour. In the mythology associated with American popular history, it was the farmers and the homesteaders who had tamed the wilderness of the American West, and that had given them immense influence on American governments.

The First World War had seen massive growth in the agricultural industry and prices for food products had risen by 25%. More and more land had been brought into cultivation to take advantage of the high prices and to meet the demand for American food – especially from the warring nations of Europe.

This demand fell off quickly once the war had ended as the Europeans could now turn their attention to producing their own food again. Prices soon began to fall as a result, but worse was to follow. The introduction of Prohibition (see below) cut the demand for the grain that had previously been used in the production of alcoholic drink, whilst higher living standards led to more Americans eating more meat and fewer cereals. To this was added a greater use of tractors on farms, which meant that fewer horses were used, which in turn reduced the demand for animal feedstuffs. The consequence of all this was a significant drop in the price of bread, which fell from \$2.5 to \$1. It was a similar story in other sectors, such as cotton, where the increase in the use of synthetic fibres reduced demand significantly.

Meanwhile technological advances meant that more could be produced on the same acreage as before, or even on a reduced acreage. During the 1920s some 13 million acres of farmland were taken out of production yet agricultural output increased by 9% in the same period. Greater efficiency on the farms led to greater production – but this would count for nothing unless there was demand for the extra produce. This demand simply was not there, which meant that farms were over-producing food, which led to falling food prices.

The collapse in prices led to many farms operating on a loss – some have estimated that in the 1920s as many as two-thirds of all farms were in serious financial difficulties. Worst hit were the wage labourers, the tenant farmers and the share-croppers.

Farmers were quick to lay the blame for the situation on the government. They pointed out that during the war it had been the government which had encouraged them to increase production; now that there was overproduction as a consequence the government was doing nothing to help the farmers.

The reality was that the agricultural industry needed to change in the 1920s in line with other industries. Farms needed to make a profit in order to survive into the longer term, and thus the 1920s saw the emergence of '*agricultural businesses*', which were highly capitalised operations using mass production techniques for produce such as cereals and fruit. They also needed little in the way of labour. These large farms survived the 1920s – it was the small scale farmers who struggled. They came to the conclusion that they were being squeezed out of business by the banks and big businesses, and they often asked the government for help.

Although the Republican governments of the 1920s were seen as having laissez-faire attitudes, the government was not guilty of ignoring these pleas for help. Government policy was to encourage farms to co-operate in order to sell their produce. To this end the Agricultural Credits Act was passed in 1923, which funded twelve Intermediate Credit Banks to offer loans to co-operative farms. This was of little use to small farmers – the last thing they needed at the time was more debt; however, the Act did prove useful to the larger agricultural businesses, which took advantage of the loans and in consequence squeezed the smaller farms even more.

The tariffs introduced by the government in 1921 and 1922 might also have helped the farmers by protecting American farmers from foreign competition on the US market. This was however of little use at a time of overproduction in the USA. Farmers needed to sell their surplus abroad, but they were unable to do this because foreign countries had placed their own tariffs on American goods in retaliation for the American tariffs. This priced American farm produce out of the export market.

The only solution to the problems facing American farmers was a reduction in output. This was never going to be realistic – none would voluntarily cut their own production because they did not trust their neighbouring rival to do likewise. Many farmers hoped that the government would step in by guaranteeing a fixed price for produce to the farmers and then trying to sell that produce abroad for whatever price it could get. In fact such a proposal passed through Congress on two separate occasions, but it was vetoed both times by President Coolidge.

Coolidge refused to consider the idea because he believed it did nothing to solve the problem of overproduction, which was the cause of the problem in agriculture. He also felt that dumping American foodstuffs on the world market would sour American relations with other countries and that the whole process would be too bureaucratic and cumbersome. In any case, there was no guarantee that foreign countries would accept American food.

Thus the problem continued. As prices continued to fall, many farmers concluded that the only way they could make ends meet was to grow more produce. This was exactly what was not needed because it only exacerbated the problem of overproduction and led to further falls in prices. As the decade wore on more and more farmers saw their mortgages foreclosed and lost their land. Many were very bitter.

There was a lesson to be learned from the farming industry – the American economy as a whole had boomed during the 1920s based on ever-increasing demand. By contrast, agriculture had shown what happened when demand fell off. Farmers were not to be left alone in this situation for long.

The Uneven Distribution of Income

The old staple industries of the United States had been based in the North East, notably in the states of Michigan, Illinois and Pennsylvania. The new industries of the 1920s were also drawn to these areas, primarily because of the easy availability of coal and other raw materials, a well-established communications system, a large workforce and proximity to major cities such as Boston and New York. By contrast there was little in the way of industrial development in other American regions, particularly in the South and West, where little had changed since the nineteenth century. The boom of the 1920s passed these regions by.

However, the older industries also suffered during the 1920s. Coal faced increasing competition from oil as a source of power and energy, whilst the greater use of synthetic fibres reduced the demand for cotton. Although the car industry boomed massively in the 1920s, the railways suffered from the increasing use of cars, and agriculture was especially badly hit.

This variation in industrial development meant that wages varied according to where the industry was based, whether there was any industry at all and what type of industry it was. For example, by 1929 the average per capita wage in the northern and eastern states was \$921; in the South East the figure was \$365 per year per capita. There were also significant variations within regions. For instance, South Carolina in the South East saw an average per capita income of \$412 for workers not engaged in farming; by contrast South Carolina farmers earned a mere \$129 per year.

The divide was significant by 1929. Many Americans struggled to reach the amount recommended by the Federal Bureau of Labour as the minimum income needed to support an acceptable living standard. Women tended to suffer more than men because they received lower wages even when they were working in the same jobs as men. Although the 1920s led to the popular image of flappers and a greater emancipation for women, the reality for most women was a concentration on marriage, family and the battle to keep a home.

At the very bottom of the pile were the African-Americans and the Native Americans. The latter continued to eke out a miserable life on infertile reservations, whilst the former remained concentrated in the poor South East of the USA even after emancipation. There was more migration of African-Americans in the early twentieth century towards the North USA, but even in the North there was discrimination in terms of housing and employment.

The International Debt Situation

The financial priority of the USA following the First World War was to regain the money that had been loaned to the European allies. However, this was not easily accomplished because the Europeans lacked the money to repay their debts. They were not helped by American tariff policy, which was prohibitive and which meant that European countries could not export goods to the USA in large enough quantities to earn the money needed to pay off their war debts.

Because of this circumstance the former European allies were dependent on German reparation payments to pay off their debts. The Germans had been blamed for starting the war and had been forced as a consequence to pay reparations as compensation for the damage done during the fighting. However, following the crises of the early 1920s and the Dawes Plan of 1924, the United States was lending money to Germany so that the Germans could honour their reparation obligations. It was with the money provided by the Germans that America's former allies were paying off their debts. Therefore, in effect, the Americans were simply paying themselves back.

Falling Demand

The lessons of overproduction experienced in the agricultural industry were not heeded during the 1920s, even though the American economic boom depended upon continued demand from the domestic market. There was little opportunity for foreign trade, partly because of the high tariffs imposed by the Europeans in retaliation for American tariffs, and partly because of the depressed nature of European economies.

However, few had considered what would happen when domestic demand began to fall off, even though the warning signs were there for all to see. Even in the best of times during the 1920s huge corporations were growing, but smaller businesses were being squeezed out – exactly the same situation that had hit the farming industry. During the 1920s, for every four businesses that succeeded, three more failed, and the government was no more prepared to assist failing businessmen than it was to help the small farmers.

Demand for new construction projects also fell after 1926, which reduced the demand for building materials, skilled workmen like carpenters, and transport operators. Unemployment in construction-related industries began to rise as a consequence. Rising unemployment is a certain way to reduce demand as people out of work have less money to spend and thus demand fewer products.

However, by the late 1920s American production was outstripping demand in a major way, leading to overproduction. The American domestic market was saturated with goods that could not be sold. This was partly because in 1929 there were increasing numbers of Americans who were in no position to buy any non-essential items. One estimate in 1929 claimed that as many as 80% of the American population was living close to subsistence levels – even when they were employed. There was little in the way of assistance for the workers – the trade unions were effectively powerless as a result of several Supreme Court decisions.

The decline in demand soon had its effect on unemployment levels, which steadily began to rise. Less demand meant less need for production, and hence less need for the workers who produced the goods. The increasing unemployment levels meant that there was reduced purchasing power, which meant that demand decreased further. This, in turn, led to a fall in output, which merely fuelled unemployment and reduced purchasing power once again.

Yet as 1929 began the Americans remained optimistic. The frenzy of speculation on the stock market suggested that there was no economic problem facing the USA. President Herbert Hoover summed it all up: *'We have... decreased fear of poverty, fear of unemployment, the fear of old age...'*

It proved to be one of the most inaccurate assessments of the American economy ever.

Speculation on the Stock Market

Although easy credit had been introduced as a means of boosting demand, there were drawbacks to the concept. Several people were lured into debts that they could not service. Others believed in the promises of get-rich-quick schemes. They invested their money into speculative ventures – and nearly always lost every cent.

One of the most famous schemes was the Florida Land Boom. Before 1920 the state of Florida was largely undeveloped with a small population. However, in 1910 rich industrialists had begun to build elegant hotels in Florida, and once the motor car became readily available, Florida became a major location for vacations and retirements.

This meant sudden increased demand for land in Florida, and before long a fully-fledged land boom was under way. There were large scale developments on the coastline and many people saw an opportunity to make money. People began to buy land in Florida without having seen it, often paying on credit after a 10% deposit.

There were plenty of success stories. One such story claimed a parcel of land bought in 1900 for \$25 had been sold in 1925 for \$150,000. The problem was that the land boom could only be sustained as long as there were more purchasers than there were sellers.

At the same time as demand began to falter, stories were revealed of people that had been conned. Some claimed they had been sold so-called coastal land which proved to be many miles inland, often within an alligator-infested swamp.

The Florida land boom was likely to falter in any case, but the final straw was the hurricanes in 1926, which killed 400 people and left 50,000 homeless. People were discouraged from moving to Florida, and the land boom collapsed. Florida was left with numerous half-finished or storm-battered developments.

Any lessons to be learned from the Florida experience were ignored as Americans went 'Wall Street Crazy' in 1927. 'Buying on the margin' meant people could purchase stocks and shares using money borrowed from the bank. If the price of these stocks and shares rose, then people could sell them off, pay off the loan and reap a quick profit.

For a while this method worked, sometimes spectacularly so. For instance, stock in the Radio Corporation of America rose to 420 cents from 85 cents, and there were stories of ordinary Americans making huge amounts of money.

In fact few ordinary Americans invested in stocks and shares because they could not afford the prices. What mattered was the number of large enterprises that invested their profits in the stocks and shares of other enterprises. Whilst the market continued to show increases in the value of these stocks and shares there was no need for concern. But the market could easily take a downward turn...

The weaknesses of the American banking system had also been revealed by the end of the decade. Essentially the system was out-of-date. There were twelve regulatory reserve banks which were under the control of the Federal Reserve Board. This was headed by seven people appointed by the President, and the idea was that the banks would regulate themselves without the government having to interfere.

However, this system meant that the reserve banks represented the interests of bankers rather than of the country as a whole; they were very unlikely to act against their own interests. Another problem was that, although national banks had to join this centralised system, state banks did not, and the money of most ordinary people was actually invested in state banks. In the 1920s there were nearly 30,000 banks in the USA, many of which were very small – and unable to withstand major setbacks. If they collapsed then their customers would lose all their saving.

Task

Create a presentation or information sheet explaining the weaknesses of the American economy in the 1920s.

You should include information on the following:

- **Farming:** *The First World War, overproduction, technology, 'agribusinesses', government policies, including tariffs and the attempt to reduce production, farmers' debt*
- **Income Distribution:** *Staple and new industries, regional variations, women and African Americans*
- **The International Debt Cycle:** *German reparations, allied war debts*
- **Falling Demand:** *Failing businesses, rising unemployment, the domestic market*
- **Other Factors:** *Stock Market speculation, the Florida Land Boom, buying on the margin, the American banking system*

Conclude your presentation with a reasoned statement saying whether or not the US economy was on the brink of collapse by 1929.

Why was Prohibition introduced?

Prohibition was the term given to the American attempt to ban the manufacture and sale of alcohol. It was a period of contradiction and it had some profound social consequences for the USA.

Prohibition was supported by a number of different organisations, often by those who looked for the government to push people towards '*healthy, clean and wholesome lives*'. It is ironic that a government that believed it should keep out of business and economic matters chose to accept the arguments from those in favour of Prohibition and therefore interfere in people's private lives to an extent unprecedented in American history.

The campaign for national Prohibition was long and involved several separate interest groups. Many religious groups believed that alcohol was the product of the Devil and was the biggest cause of sin. Supporters from these religious groups tended to be Protestant, living in the small towns of the southern states or the Mid-West. They were supported in their views by the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which argued that alcohol was a threat to family life. Men would waste money on drink that should be used to support families; in some cases alcohol would lead to the abuse of wives and children.

The first success for the WCTU was the agreement by the state government in Kansas to introduce Prohibition during the 1870s. In the 1890s the Anti-Saloon League joined the campaign. This was a pressure group and it tended to support pro-prohibition political candidates. By the beginning of the First World War many mid-western and western states had been persuaded to turn '*dry*'.



The First World War provided added stimulus to the campaign to ban alcoholic drink. It was argued that the war effort could not be effective if people were permitted to drink, and it was claimed that cereals were too valuable to be '*wasted*' on the production of an inherently '*evil*' product. At the time most of the big brewers were owned by people of German origin – Budweiser, Pabst and Schlitz. Many of these breweries had helped finance the National German-American Alliance, which had put forward German interests prior to the American declaration of war in 1917. It therefore became unpatriotic to drink.

By the end of the First World War a decision to ban alcohol across the USA looked more than likely – not least because the opponents of Prohibition were not well organised. There was little objection to the idea of Prohibition beyond a resolution passed by the American Federation of Labour against the taking away of the working man's beer and a few rallies in places like New York and Baltimore.

As a result, in 1919 the 18th Amendment to the US Constitution was passed. This banned the sale, transportation and manufacture of intoxicating liquor within the USA. A separate act in 1920, known as the Volstead Act, defined intoxicating liquor as any drink with more than 0.5% alcoholic volume.

Together these two decisions introduced the '*noble experiment*' of Prohibition. It was to be a disaster.

Task

Create a publicity leaflet outlining the arguments for Prohibition

Why did Gangsterism increase during Prohibition?

Prohibition led to a massive increase in the number of gangsters in the USA and in organised crime. Mobsters ended up controlling city areas by force and establishing monopolies which would have done nineteenth century trusts proud.



The attraction for the gangsters was the lucrative profits that could be made from the illegal supply and sale of alcohol. George Remus for instance was able to arrange for an army of 3,000 gangsters to 'hijack' his product of 'medicinal' alcohol and divert it to the illegal stills of the big cities. He made \$5 million in 5 years.

With this amount of money available the gangsters were able to control politicians and law enforcers. In Chicago the Mayor allowed gangsters to function unmolested. However, in 1925 he was beaten in the mayoral election after it was discovered that \$1 million had been diverted from public money. This did not deter the gangsters, who merely bided their time until they could get their man elected once again.

The most notorious gangster was Al Capone (*right*), who became as famous as a film star. Capone considered himself to be the personification of free competition, supplying people with a product in demand. Prohibition provided him with huge profits, estimated at some \$70 million, but in the end he was arrested and imprisoned for tax evasion.



Capone's comments were, however, telling, because he maintained there would be no point trying to sell beer to people who didn't want it. The fact remained that people tolerated the gangsters because they provided a product in demand. Police officers who wanted a drink often turned a blind eye to gangster activity, as did judges, and many juries refused to convict those who were the suppliers of their desired alcoholic beverages. The whole basis of the American legal system was being undermined – not least because the law was making criminals of so many American citizens, who were thus prepared to side with the gangsters rather than the law.

The question that remained was simple: If people were prepared to tolerate the providers of their illegal alcohol, what else would they tolerate in order to ensure that the supplies of alcohol were not interrupted?

Task

1. Why did organised crime start to supply illegal alcohol to various outlets?
2. How did the gangsters keep the forces of law and order from interfering in their activities?
3. What was Al Capone's attitude towards being a gangster?
4. Why was the whole American legal system being undermined?

Why did Prohibition fail?

The Prohibition laws were the most widely ignored of any laws passed in the United States. Across the country thousands of illegal bars, called speakeasies, had sprung up and organised crime had benefited from the poor enforcement of the laws.

In fact the '*noble experiment*' was probably doomed from the start. Responsibility for the enforcement of the new law was given to the Treasury. The Anti-Saloon League estimated that \$5 million would be needed – the Treasury was given \$2 million.

The United States has more than 18,000 miles of coastline and land border. It was impossible to patrol this and so smuggling was relatively easy. By 1925 the smuggling of alcohol (known as bootlegging) was so successful that it was estimated that only about 5% of alcohol coming into the USA was intercepted. Smuggling was also profitable for those who took part. In 1924 the authorities seized alcohol to the value of \$40 million. If that represented 5% of the alcohol entering the country, the profits are easy to calculate. With these profits many '*bootleggers*' started up their own enterprises, producing and distributing illegal alcohol. One bootlegger, George Remus, managed to make \$5 million profit in 5 years.



Prohibition agents destroying barrels of seized alcohol

The new law allowed chemists to sell alcohol on prescription – which was a provision soon abused. Industrial alcohol was also available, easily diverted and re-distilled. This led to several issues related to health – industrial alcohol had an unpleasant taste and smell, and needed to be disguised with other flavours. It is said that one buyer of a product called '*whisky*' took it to a chemist for analysis. He was told that his horse had diabetes! There were also several instances of alcoholic poisoning.

Law enforcement never stood a chance. Treasury agents were always under-funded and there weren't enough of them. Each agent was paid an average salary of \$2,500 and they were expected to shut down an illegal industry whose profits amounted to some \$2 billion each year. Many were easily corrupted by those willing to offer large bribes. One is reputed to have made \$7 million selling illegal licences and pardons to bootleggers, and between 1920 and 1929 some 10% of the agents were fined for corruption. These were the ones that were caught...

It was also true that the mood of the country changed during the 1920s. Many Americans could not see the harm in a celebratory drink at Christmas or in a cool beer on a hot summer's day. In the cities many actively sought out the speakeasies and by the end of the decade it was estimated that there were more illegal speakeasies in New York than there had been legal saloons before Prohibition. It was plain to see that many Americans were prepared to defy the law.

Finally, the '*dry*' lobby, whilst very well organised to achieve its goal of Prohibition, was badly prepared to help enforce it. For example, the Anti-Saloon League was divided between those who wanted stricter enforcement laws and those who believed education programmes were needed to prevent people wanting to drink in the first place.

By 1929 many people were questioning the value of Prohibition on the grounds that it was not succeeding. In fact the Democrat candidate in the 1928 presidential election, Al Smith, had tried to turn Prohibition into a campaign issue, though in the event he was defeated by Herbert Hoover, who supported the continuation of Prohibition. However, the experiment had led to a massive increase in crime, with 227 gangland murders in Chicago alone between 1927 and 1930. Illegal drinking had also criminalised huge numbers of people who would otherwise never have considered committing a crime.

Socially the experiment worked against the working classes. It had been working class saloons that had been closed down in 1920, and they were replaced by the speakeasies. Because of the illegal nature of the drinks industry, alcohol was expensive and therefore beyond the pocket of most working class Americans. Some have even argued that Congress was unwilling to enforce Prohibition because Congressmen were not willing to alienate rich and influential voters.

Meanwhile it is debatable how enthusiastic the federal government was about enforcing Prohibition. The Republicans tended to think that less government was better government, and many state governments could best be described as *'lukewarm'* towards enforcing the law. On the other hand nobody in government seemed willing to state openly that Prohibition was failing on the basis that too many ordinary American citizens liked drinking – even though this was blatantly obvious to everyone.

During his presidency, Hoover set up the Wickersham Commission to investigate Prohibition. It deliberated for 19 months and declared that the law could not be enforced. However, it also stated its belief that Prohibition should be allowed to continue.

There was therefore no resolution of the problems that had arisen as a result of Prohibition by the end of the 1920s.

Task

Write a report to the US Government outlining the reasons for the failure of Prohibition.

What was the impact of immigration on the United States?

People had come to the USA for a variety of reasons, such as a search for a new and better life or a desire to escape from religious or political persecution at home. The majority of the immigrants went no further than the large American cities. Most did not have enough money to start out as farmers and many were attracted by the wages and / or the ease of settling into an area where previous immigrants from their homelands had already settled.

Consequently, particular nationalities were attracted to certain neighbourhoods, which soon developed an individual ethnic culture of their own. For the immigrant this development was helpful, providing some certainty and security at a difficult transitory stage. As a result the Irish became dominant in Boston; Czechs and Poles flocked to Chicago and Italians took over Brooklyn, New York. Immigration was the largest factor in American urban growth – by 1910 one-third of the population in the 12 largest US cities was immigrant, whilst a further third was composed of the children of immigrants.

The US government had not been slow to realise that immigrants provided a cheap supply of unskilled labour. The immigrants were desperate for work and they were easily exploited, having no concept of their rights or the employment laws of the USA. However, there was tension between the immigrants and locally born Americans because the latter considered the immigrants as a threat, either to their job opportunities or to wage levels. There was strong working-class resentment of the immigrants.

Many of the immigrants had arrived with little or no experience of political activity in their home countries. In the United States things were different. Immigrants were predominant in certain town and city districts so issues affecting them were important. Local politicians could exploit this by providing economic and social support for the immigrants in return for votes.

There was also a racial element. Some Americans, for example, were concerned that many of the immigrants were Catholic, owing allegiance to the Pope rather than the President. Prohibition exacerbated these racial overtones, because several Americans blamed the production of '*evil drink*' on Italian, German and Irish immigrants.

Americans born in the USA also tended to be prejudiced against the immigrants, treating them as scapegoats for the ills of American society. The tendency of the immigrants to live in their own districts, making little effort to integrate, made them easy targets. At the same time the spread of '*un-American*' ideas, like anarchism and socialism, was blamed on the influx of European immigrants.

For many Americans the immigrants were the reason for many social and economic ills in the United States. Tensions could often lead to violence – for instance, in 1891 eleven Italians were lynched in New Orleans after a local jury acquitted them of murder. These tensions were also one of the main reasons for the rise of the Ku Klux Klan during the 1920s.

Task

1. Why did so many immigrants settle in the larger American cities?
2. Why did locally-born Americans consider immigrants to be a threat?
3. How did immigrants benefit from American democracy?
4. How was immigration and Prohibition linked?
5. Why were immigrants easy scapegoats for social ills in the USA?
6. What '*un-American*' ideas were blamed on immigrants?

Why was there a 'Red Scare' in the early 1920s?

Calls for a restriction on immigration grew during the First World War because many doubted the loyalty of new immigrants, especially those from Germany or Austria-Hungary. An Immigration Act was therefore passed in 1917, which excluded all immigrants who could not read or write English.

The fears of foreigners and their '*un-American*' ideas grew as a result of the Communist revolution in Russia in November 1917. Americans feared the spread of world revolution, and pointed to the growing industrial disputes after the war as evidence of left-wing ideas undermining traditional American values.

In reality the main cause for the growth in industrial disputes was the high inflation rate. It has been estimated that some four million workers went on strike in 1919 for higher wages and / or better conditions. However, many Americans were convinced that the strikers were led by Communist agitators who were working for revolution in the United States. Their fears grew as Seattle was brought to a standstill during a general strike and policemen went on strike in Boston.

In the minds of many Americans the '*Communist threat*' was associated with the new wave of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, and the Red Scare developed from the fear of revolution. It was a scare that led to the arrest of some 6,000 people during the so-called Palmer Raids, named after the Attorney General Mitchell Palmer.

Palmer had been affected by a bomb that had exploded near his home in Washington DC. The bomb had been planted by anarchists, but Palmer considered all left-wing groups and organisations to be a threat to American society. In many ways however he also hoped to use the Red Scare as a springboard for his nomination as the Democratic candidate in the 1920 election.

His exposure of Communist activity made him popular with many Americans, but in the event most the people arrested as a result of the Palmer Raids had to be released within a few days because there was no evidence against them. Palmer was finally discredited when he announced that a huge Communist demonstration in New York would take place on 20th May 1920, which would herald the beginning of the Communist Revolution in the USA. When nothing happened on that day, Palmer looked ridiculous and the Red Scare began to die down.

Yet for some Americans there was a real threat of left-wing ideas threatening American '*values*'. This concern was never to really leave them.

Task

Write an article for a magazine in June 1920 criticising the actions of Mitchell Palmer. You may want to include some or all of the following:

- The Immigration Act of 1917
- American distaste for Communism
- The bomb attacks
- The Palmer Raids and the methods used
- The number of acquittals following on from the Raids
- The failure of the Communist Revolution to occur on 20th May

Why was the case of Sacco and Vanzetti significant?

On 15th April 1920 a paymaster, accompanied by a guard, were walking down the main street of South Braintree, Massachusetts. They were carrying \$15,000. As they walked along two men approached them, pulled out guns, shot dead both paymaster and guard and then grabbed the money.

At first the case aroused no more than local interest; as such cases were not uncommon in the USA. However, a trap set up by the police to ensnare the perpetrators of the deed caught two Italians – Sacco (*right*) and Vanzetti (*left*). The police had not considered them suspects for the crime, but picked them up anyway. Both were found to be carrying guns, and police analysis of their answers to interrogation revealed that they had been lying. As a result they were charged with carrying out the South Braintree murders. The case was about to hit international news.



Vanzetti was also facing a second charge – a hold-up in Bridgewater that had taken place on 24th December 1919. Under the law of the state of Massachusetts it was usual to try a suspect for the more serious of the crimes if they were accused of more than one crime. However, Vanzetti was tried first on the lesser charge – the failed Bridgewater robbery.

During the course of this trial Vanzetti's lawyer put forward a strong alibi and brought forth several witnesses to support it. Despite this Vanzetti was found guilty. One strong possibility for this result was the fact that most of the witnesses were Italian who could not speak good English. Their testimony was therefore given to the jury in translation, which the jury decided was unconvincing. It also counted against Vanzetti that he refused to take the stand in his own defence.

Vanzetti had his reasons for this decision. He had left-wing sympathies and had participated in radical activity within the USA. He was fearful that, if he took the stand, he would have to confess under oath to his radicalism. This, he felt, would have counted against him during the period of the Red Scare, so he preferred to remain silent.

However, the jury interpreted his silence as an admission of guilt, and the judge went on to pronounce a harsh sentence on Vanzetti, even though it was a first offence and nobody had been hurt. Vanzetti was convinced this harsh sentence was entirely as a result of the hostile attitude of the American authorities towards foreign radicals.

Both Sacco and Vanzetti realised that their defence in the South Braintree trial would have to take the prevailing attitudes towards left-wing activities into account. As their defence lawyer they chose Fred Moore, who was a socialist lawyer and who had defended many radical activists in court. Moore was aware that the arrest of Sacco and Vanzetti was connected to the Red Scare. Neither man had had a criminal record when they were picked up, but the authorities were aware of their activity within anarchist circles. Anarchists were also known to have been involved in strikes and agitation and there had been several clashes with the law.

When he was arrested Sacco was found to be in possession of a draft leaflet for an anarchist meeting, which announced Sacco as the main speaker. In their subsequent interrogation the police chose to focus on this rather than on the incident at South Braintree. This made both Sacco and Vanzetti afraid that they could expose some of their anarchist colleagues to the risk of deportation from the USA, so both men

chose to lie to the police. These lies were unconvincing and easily exposed by the police, who came to the conclusion that the lies were a '*consciousness of guilt*'.

Moore realised that he was unlikely to win the case by concentrating solely on the South Braintree murders. He decided to focus attention on the political nature of the case and tried to get both men to admit in court that they were anarchists. Moore then wanted to argue that they had been arrested and charged because of their political activities rather than their involvement in common criminal activity. He believed the whole issue revolved around a desire on the part of federal authorities to clamp down on anarchists.



The defence was openly political, and soon went beyond the courtroom. Moore arranged public meetings across the USA, sought the assistance of the trade unions, distributed leaflets throughout the country and made contact with international organisations. He even asked the Italian government for help. The trial had become internationalised. It lasted six weeks, by which time the prosecution had placed its emphasis on themes of patriotism in an effort to counter the political nature of the defence. Little was said about the events at South Braintree.

The position of the defence did not work however. On 14th July 1921, the jury found both men guilty of robbery and murder. This was not the end of the matter as the defence immediately began a series of appeals and petitions to save the two men from execution. The defence claimed that some prosecution witnesses had lied in court, that the police had acted illegally and that a convicted bank robber had confessed to the crime at South Braintree. The defence demanded a retrial – but the judge rejected the demands.

It was the same judge who had sentenced Vanzetti so harshly over the Bridgewater crime.

By now the nature of Moore's defence was coming under scrutiny. His methods had made use of modern technology and had proved very effective. Unfortunately they were also very expensive and were paid for by the contributions of ordinary working class Americans. This troubled many anarchists. In 1924 therefore Moore was replaced as defence counsel by William Thompson, who had no sympathy with the politics of Sacco and Vanzetti but who did want to uphold the legal system of Massachusetts and its reputation. He believed this was under question in the Sacco and Vanzetti case.

Thompson wanted to ignore the political aspects of the case and concentrate on the events in South Braintree. However this was easier said than done. By this time many American liberals had become troubled by the legal implications of the case and the questionable actions of the police and the authorities. The case was seen by them as flawed and deeply unjust.

Against this was conservative opinion, which felt it had to defend the honour of the American legal system. They believed that the case had exposed two common criminals who had been convicted after a fair trial by a jury. Liberal sentiment and protest was little more than an assault on the very principles of the American justice system.

At the same time the case was still an international issue. Protests about the treatment of the two men took place in various foreign cities, including Buenos Aires and London. In the face of international opinion Governor Fuller of Massachusetts considered the use of executive clemency for the two men and

set up an advisory committee on the issue. The committee investigated and eventually declared that the judicial process had been *just 'on the whole'*. It decided that clemency was unwarranted, and Sacco and Vanzetti were executed on 23rd August 1927.

The repercussions of their deaths lasted beyond the ending of the case. Many Americans were concerned about the way in which the American legal system and American democracy worked. The system seemed to favour the rich and the powerful and to work in favour of the authorities when it should embody the principle of justice and fairness for all.

As for the crime at South Braintree – the evidence is inconclusive. Earlier commentators declared that the two men were in fact innocent of the crime and had been executed for political reasons, but since then the verdict of history has been less clear. It will probably never be known.

However, for many Americans the whole issue was very clear-cut. They argued that American cities were filling with foreigners who would not adopt American ways of life and who were determined to overthrow that way of life. Something needed to be done.

Task

- A: *There was absolutely no evidence linking either Mr Sacco or Mr Vanzetti with the events in Braintree. Their convictions are fundamentally unsound.*
- B: *The two men were convicted fairly under US law. They can have no complaints, despite the beliefs of some that they were convicted more for their beliefs than for their deeds.*
- C: *The case is flawed and the conviction unsafe – it seems that they were both convicted for their left-wing beliefs. The judge and the police should be ashamed of their decisions, especially once another criminal had confessed to the deed.*
- D: *Both men lied to the police when interrogated, both men were armed when arrested and neither man was able to satisfactorily explain their movements. It was the evidence that convicted Sacco and Vanzetti – and nothing else.*

Match the above statements with the person below most likely to have made them.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. The liberal citizen | 2. The conservative citizen |
| 3. The prosecution lawyer | 4. The defence lawyer |

How was immigration restricted?

The Emergency Immigration Act of 1921 was the first time that a limit was placed on immigration. This restricted new European immigration to 3% of the total number of that particular origin already living in the USA as shown by the 1910 census. This restriction greatly favoured immigration from Britain and Western Europe and discriminated against Southern and Eastern Europeans.

Restrictions were made permanent in 1924 with the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act. This set new quotas of 2% based on the 1890 census. In effect this Act closed immigration from Eastern Europe because there had been so few from Eastern Europe before 1890. However, the Act did not apply to Hispanic Americans from Mexico, because they were needed as labourers for the farmers of California.

A new law in 1927 laid down that only 150,000 immigrants could enter the USA per year, based on the *'national origins of the American people of 1920'*. Japanese and Chinese immigrants were excluded altogether. The restrictions on immigration confirmed White Protestants as the top social and political group within the USA. The impact varied. Restriction meant there was little competition for jobs from would-be immigrants, which perhaps prevented social problems arising during the Great Depression that began in 1929. On the other hand the restrictions limited the cultural diversity that had developed in several American cities.

It was not until the 1960s that the immigration laws were relaxed.

Task

Explain the significance of the following years in the story of immigration restrictions in the USA:

1890 1910 1921 1924 1927

Why might the immigration laws be considered racist?

How and why did the Ku Klux Klan rise and fall in popularity during the 1920s?

The huge numbers of immigrants to the USA at the turn of the century and into the second decade of the twentieth century brought some 23 million people into the USA – and with this came the fears that American culture was being swamped by '*aliens*'. Meanwhile the American experience of the First World War led to a reaction in the 1920s as the USA reverted to its traditional foreign policy of isolationism. Foreign affairs were to be ignored as much as possible and the United States should not become involved in matters affecting other countries.

Both attitudes revealed a deep distrust of foreigners, and partly explain the increasing support for the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. However, the main impetus for the rejuvenation of the Klan came from events in the southern states. The Populist movement of the late nineteenth century had tried to arrange for joint action between black and poor white Americans against the big estate owners and the Establishment in the American South. The Establishment responded to the challenge by an appeal to white supremacy along with a manipulation of the voting system so as to exclude black Americans from voting.

The Populist movement therefore got nowhere in the South, but it had raised the spectre of black Americans gaining some sort of political power. The Establishment appeal to white supremacy had been based partly on white American fears of losing both their power and their gene pool, and many white Americans came to the conclusion that black Americans had to be frozen out of society. Most of the segregationist legislation therefore dates from the 1890s, whilst the number of black Americans lynched in the South rose dramatically.

William Simmons was a veteran of the Spanish-American War of 1898 who dreamed of setting up his own fraternal organisation. In 1915 he decided to turn his dream into reality, so on the eve of Thanksgiving he and fifteen '*brothers*' went to Stone Mountain, Georgia. Simmons then burnt a pine cross, and the twentieth century Ku Klux Klan was born.

Simmons adopted the titles and the rituals of the original KKK that had ended in 1869, but his new Klan had little in common with its predecessor. The new KKK had more in common with other benevolent societies that had sprung up across the United States. Simmons seems to have been primarily motivated by financial gain, but initially the KKK struggled for membership.



In 1920 Simmons met Edward Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler, who were publicists with a business in Atlanta. With Klan membership numbering only a few thousand Simmons was looking for a way to publicise his organisation. He offered Clarke and Tyler 80% of the profits from new members. The publicists agreed and launched an aggressive sales pitch designed solely to attract new members to the Klan.

The new message was mainly negative, concentrating on the fears held by many Americans about black Americans, Jews and Catholics. In the 1920s new '*fears*' were introduced – immigrants, dope-pedlars, bootleggers – and new messages spoke out against corruption, night clubs and all violations of the Sabbath. The Klan now spoke out against pre-marital and extra-marital sex, and was scathing about all forms of scandal. It claimed to stand for traditional values, but in reality took up a position of social vigilantism by rooting out what individual communities feared and / or hated, and then exploiting those fears and hatreds.

The new campaign was extremely successful – by the late summer of 1921 membership of the Klan had increased to some 100,000 people. However, increased membership brought along new problems. The Klan leadership made clear that the KKK was a fraternal society, but some of the members preferred to concentrate on the messages of hatred that had been used to attract them into joining. Incidents of violence increased. In some areas the letters 'KKK' were '*tattooed*' in acid onto the foreheads of African-Americans, Jews and others condemned as '*anti-American*'. There could be little doubt about who the perpetrators were.

In many areas the local forces of law and order simply turned a blind eye to KKK atrocities – in some cases the very lawmen and judges had even joined the Klan and participated in the violence during their leisure time. As a consequence very few Klansmen were ever arrested, even fewer were brought to trial and hardly any at all were convicted.

The increase in both membership and violence drew the attention of several journalists. In September 1921 the New York World began a series of exposures about the Klan based on the revelations of a former Klansman whose job it had been to recruit new members. Investigations also led to reports of financial irregularities, whilst other Klan '*secrets*' also fell into the public domain. Most embarrassing of all was perhaps the allegation that publicists Clarke and Tyler, propagandists for the traditional values of the Klan, had been arrested by police in 1919 during a raid on a '*house of ill repute*'. It was said that neither had been found fully clothed. Such articles tarnished the reputation of the Klan, which was seeking to claim the high moral ground in American society.

Congressional hearings into Klan activities began in 1921, but Simmons was able to persuade Congress that the secrecy of the KKK was just a part of its fraternal organisation, which had no sinister leanings whatsoever. He denied all responsibility for any act of violence that had been committed in the name of the Klan, and insisted that there was no connection between the modern Klan and its original forerunner. Congress decided to adjourn the hearings without taking any action.

In fact all this exposure about the Klan acted as free publicity and there was a further increase in membership. But the growing numbers led to internal disputes; Simmons was replaced as leader by Hiram Wesley Evans in 1922. With Tyler having left to get married and Clarke indicted on charges of immorality, Evans was to usher in a new period of Klan history.

His biggest problem was to change the image of the organisation's leadership. Charges of immorality and financial irregularities damaged Klan claims to be the defender of American morals. Evans inaugurated a wave of terror, approving cases of lynching, whipping and shooting. Many communities by this stage were under the grip of the Klan and their declared enemies could not feel safe. However it was not just immigrants, Jews and black Americans who needed to fear the violence of the Klan because a number of attacks were now being directed against white Protestants who were deemed to have offended the Klan's moral code or who were considered to be traitors to the white American race.

In Alabama a white divorcee was whipped by the Klan because she had committed the '*sin*' of remarriage. In Georgia another woman was given sixty lashes of the whip for '*immorality and failure to attend church*'. When her 15-year-old son rushed to her aid he was given the same punishment. In both cases the leaders of the Klansmen responsible were church ministers.

Instances of violence were not confined to the southern states. Klansmen in Oklahoma for instance would use the whip to punish young women they found riding about in cars with young men. This was a period when women were looking for greater freedoms, which was anathema to the Klan. The KKK declared its adherence to '*pure womanhood*', by which it meant keeping women in their traditional subservient place.

Politically the Klan was becoming a force to be reckoned with. In 1922 Texas returned Klansman Earl Mayfield to the Senate, and in state politics the Klan was accredited with aiding the successful election of the governors in Georgia, California, Oregon and Alabama. There was significant Klan representation in Ohio, Colorado, Oklahoma, Indiana and Arkansas between 1921 and 1924, and there were many more regional examples of Klan political strength.

In 1924 Evans decided to try and influence the presidential election. He reckoned that with two million members and a number of friendly politicians throughout the USA he was in a strong position to do so. Thus he moved the headquarters of the KKK from Atlanta to Washington.



The highpoint for the KKK was probably in 1924. Klansmen did well in the elections of that year, and Evans boasted that the Klan has helped Calvin Coolidge (*left*) to presidential success. He maintained that the influence of the Klan was responsible for the strict new immigration laws, and he argued that the Klan was responsible for preventing anti-Americanisms.

The Klan still attracted a large amount of negative publicity, so in August 1925 Evans chose to display the strength of the Klan and arranged for a parade of Klansmen down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington DC. Some 40,000 turned up, so Evans decided to repeat the exercise in 1926. However, only 20,000 Klansmen took part. The Klan had begun to lose its attraction, partly because many of the fears about immigration and left-wing revolution had eased, and partly because the Klan seemed to have no positive side to its policies.

Disaster had also struck in 1925 when Indiana Grand Dragon, David Curtis Stephenson, was convicted of the rape and murder of a 28-year-old secretary. In 1927 a group of Klansmen in Pennsylvania decided to go independent of Evans. Evans chose to take this issue to the courts, filing a \$100,000 damage suit against the rebels. He was confident of success, but the court case turned into a serious setback for the Klan.

The Pennsylvania rebels testified in open court on the methods of the Klan, revealed Klan secrets, and named members. This testimony was reported by the press and shocked many Americans. There were stories such as the Klansman who was severely beaten in Colorado because he wanted to leave the organisation or the Texas man soaked in oil and burned to death before an audience of several hundred Klansmen. The judge threw Evans' damage suit out of court.

In 1928 the Democratic candidate, Al Smith, was a Catholic and a bitter opponent of the KKK. Evans considered this an opportunity for the Klan to recover from the damaging court case, which was one of the main reasons why membership had declined from three million in 1925 to several hundred thousand. Evans was wrong – the American people, though they did not vote for Smith, did not rally behind the call from the Klan. It seemed that Americans had tired of the Klan, its strange rituals and its violent deeds, whilst the Immigration Laws had reduced the fears of many Americans about the numbers of foreigners entering the USA. The Klan's period of influence was over.

The Klan continued to decline during the years of Depression, when it did become a genuine fraternal society looking after its members and urging them to avoid trouble. It did complain about the number of Catholics and Jews in the government of Franklin Roosevelt, and it claimed that the New Deal was laced with Communist ideas. Evans chose to make Communism the new '*enemy*' in the 1930s, but the Klan never recovered its former position in US history.

Task

1. Explain the link between the following and the history of the Ku Klux Klan:
 - Mass Immigration
 - The reversion to isolationism in foreign policy
 - Populism
 - William Simmons
 - Stone Mountain, Georgia
 - The increase in benevolent societies
 - Edward Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler
 - *'Traditional American values'*
 - Increasing violence
 - The attitude of the forces of law and order
 - Newspaper articles and Congressional hearings
 - Hiram Wesley Evans
 - The *'wave of terror'*
 - Growing female independence
 - Earl Mayfield and Klan strength
 - The marches in Washington DC
 - David Curtis Stephenson
 - The Pennsylvania rebels
 - Immigration Laws
 - Communism
2. What do you think was the main reason for the decline in the strength of the Ku Klux Klan by 1929?
 - The end of mass immigration
 - The behaviour of the KKK leadership
 - The lack of a positive political message
 - The Great Depression
 - The decreasing fear of Communism
 - Newspaper exposure of violence

How did American society change during the 1920s?

History records the 1920s in the USA as the 'Jazz Age', and the decade certainly saw a number of significant cultural changes, such as the growth of radio entertainment and the cinema. There were also changes in popular music, fashion and dance, whilst the appearance of the 'flappers' announced changes in the status and social position of women.

American Literature

The writers and artists of the 1920s have been described as the 'Lost Generation', disillusioned by the First World War and the 'botched' peace settlement. Yet they laid the basis for modern American literature whilst providing a significant insight into American life at the time. Sinclair Lewis from Minnesota, for example, wrote about small town life in the USA and also about middle-class values.

The two most significant writers of the period were probably F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, whose works typify the feelings of disillusionment with 1920s society. Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*, spoke of the material excesses linked with the economic boom in the USA, whilst Hemingway concentrated on the experience, the physical and the emotional damage of warfare.

Meanwhile there was an African-American cultural renaissance centred on Harlem in New York. Langston Hughes' work, *The Weary Blues*, spotlighted the black experience, whilst the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People) encouraged the work of young African-American writers. However, despite this cultural development African-Americans still faced massive discrimination in terms of employment opportunities, wages, housing and education and the growth of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s was also a sign of the racial problems facing them.

The Impact of Radio and Cinema

The first radio station in the USA was KDKA of Pittsburgh – but by the end of the 1920s there were hundreds of radio stations across the country. These allowed small towns and remote rural areas to hear up-to-date news, music, plays and comedy shows. Radio broadcasting was sponsored by private

businesses, which meant that the growth of radio was matched by the growth of advertising.

By 1919 Hollywood had become the main centre for the production of films and it came to dominate the world film industry because in the era of silent films the issue of language was irrelevant. American stars dominated the silent screen – people like Buster Keaton (*left*) and Charlie Chaplin (*right*).



Every small town across the USA had a picture house and cinema became the main form of entertainment, allowing glimpses of Ancient Rome, the American West and several other sets. Meanwhile the fashions worn by the stars were copied by their fans. Cinema proved to be influential in many ways, not just in fashion. The silent film, *Birth of a Nation*, 1915, dealt with the American Civil War and its aftermath. It portrayed the Ku Klux Klan heroically and thus helped increase racism and the membership of the KKK.



The Ku Klux Klan portrayed in D.W. Griffith's 1915 film, *Birth of a Nation*

In 1927 a major technological change came with the arrival of sound. The first 'talkie' was *The Jazz Singer*, and this development merely made the cinema more popular. In 1928 the establishment of the Academy Awards, known as Oscars, provided Hollywood with an annual event by which it could prove its importance, not only to American society, but also to world cinema.

Mass Spectator Sport

The USA of the 1920s is generally regarded as the first consumer society in the world. As real wages increased, people had more disposable income for leisure activities. This encouraged the growth of mass spectator sports, particularly baseball. Professional baseball in the USA was dominated by the New York Yankees and their star performer Babe Ruth (*right*). College (American) football was also popular, as was boxing.



The Sexual Revolution



The 1920s saw the arrival of the 'flapper' (*left*) – a sophisticated, fashionable, pleasure-seeking young woman. She reflected the changes in the lives of American women in the 1920s as new fashion and new dances suggested a period of 'fun times'. No longer did every woman see herself in the role of home-maker and child-carer. Young women began to look towards an independent lifestyle where they did not necessarily have to look for a husband. There were greater employment opportunities in the 1920s as well, which allowed women far more freedom than previously had been possible.

The symbol of the period was Hollywood film star Clara Bow (*right*), known as the 'It Girl'. In the words of novelist Scott Fitzgerald "*she was pretty, impudent, superbly assured, worldly – wise and briefly clad*". The decade also saw an increase in sexuality, as birth control methods were more extensively practised, and there was a rapid growth in smoking among women.



However, the biggest growth industry for females was that of cosmetics, which increased its earnings in the 1920s from \$17 million to \$200 million per year. Beauty salons began to appear across the USA, and some products became household names, such as Chanel and Elizabeth Arden. Before the 1920s make-up had generally been associated with prostitution; in the 1920s women took control of their own sexuality, using make-up for their own purposes whilst removing their corsets and shortening the length of their dresses.

Of course, the flapper was only one side of the social coin and in some ways the decade was one of unfulfilled hope for many women. The 19th Amendment to the US Constitution gave American women the vote but no distinctive women's movement ever emerged in the USA. American politics continued to be dominated by men and the National Woman's Party failed in 1923 to get acceptance for an Equal Rights Amendment.

Continuity and Conservatism

In some parts of America the new cultural trends were associated with vice and immorality. Jazz and the cinema were distrusted, whilst some of the modern dances, such as the Charleston and the Black Bottom were seen as the work of the Devil. Women who smoked in public, who went to speakeasies and who wore short skirts were regarded as shameless. There was also concern about the growth of crime across the USA.

These concerns led to something of a religious revival in the USA. This Christian fundamentalism involved accepting the words of the Bible literally and acknowledging that one's lifestyle should reflect the word of God. Church attendance in the USA was declining overall, but some churches experienced a growth in popularity. This was especially so in the cities, where God-fearing citizens sought answers to the growth of 'sin' in their neighbourhoods.

Controversy erupted in 1925 in Tennessee, where fundamentalists had declared it to be illegal for Darwin's concept of evolution to be taught in schools. One science teacher in the small town of Dayton in the state of Tennessee – John Scopes – was persuaded to put this particular law to the test. He taught the theory of evolution and, in due course, he was arrested, prosecuted and put on trial.

The trial became a major media event, with the defence lawyer ridiculing a literal interpretation of the Bible, questioning the creation of Eve from a rib belonging to Adam and the creation of the world in the year 4004 BC. Many city dwellers found the entire affair very humorous, but Scopes was still found guilty of breaking the law. He was fined \$100.

The growth of fundamentalism, the support given to the Ku Klux Klan and the attempt at Prohibition can be seen as a last attempt by Americans in the small towns and rural areas to resist the changes brought about by the twentieth century. They looked to keep the USA white and Protestant and free from foreign ideas like Communism. These people also tended to dislike change and disapproved of anything that might lead to sin. Hence they believed that alcohol caused sin and should be prohibited. To them the cities were hotbeds of sin and sexual licence, whilst the culture of African-Americans was to be avoided altogether.

Instead they looked back to a past period of hard work, high moral standards and Christianity. Of course such a period had never existed. Much American history revealed turbulence, violence and race hatred. All of it had revealed change. In this the 1920s in the USA were no different from what had come before.

Task

How did the following affect US society in the 1920s?

- The Lost Generation
- Harlem and the NAACP
- The growth of the Ku Klux Klan
- KDKA and radio broadcasting
- Hollywood and the Oscars
- Mass spectator sport
- The *'flapper'*
- Sex and Sexuality
- Beauty products and beauty care
- The 19th Amendment
- Christian Fundamentalism
- John Scopes
- The *'good old days'*

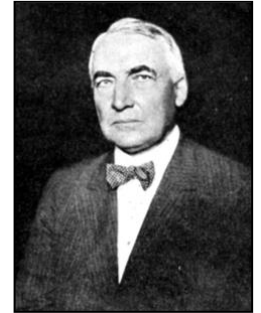
Chapter Two: Foreign Policy

How Isolationist was the USA between the Two World Wars?

Although he could not participate in the 1920 presidential election, Woodrow Wilson (*left*) had wanted it to be one big referendum on the peace settlement. In this he was unduly optimistic – such elections are normally fought on a range of issues. However, the result of the election was clear – Wilson's foreign policy had been rejected by the electorate.



The victor was Warren Harding (*right*), who believed in the traditional position of the USA in world affairs. This meant rejecting any form of collective security. The United States would look after its own destiny, and avoid any commitments abroad.



By 1920 many Americans had come to the conclusion that involvement in the First World War had been a huge mistake. Many were pleased by the Senate's rejection of the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations. It was typical of an American determination to keep out of world affairs.

This attitude – usually known as isolationism – has led many to criticise the USA. They have accused the Americans of abdicating a crucial world responsibility. In evidence they cite American inactivity during the 1930s. It seemed then that the USA was in some way tacitly condoning the expansionism of Japan, Italy and Germany because the USA stood on the sidelines and did nothing, even though the world was becoming far more threatening to US interests.

However, this view was not one shared by the vast majority of Americans at the time. For them there really was no need for the USA to concern itself with matters outside the United States. Some saw that an international awareness would be necessary if American overseas trade was to develop, just as Americans would need to be aware of the effects on that trade of the actions of and events in foreign countries. But it was an idea removed from the vision of most ordinary Americans.

Throughout the inter-war years the USA remained concerned solely with its own interests. It took a strict line with war debts, insisting that its former wartime allies pay them off in full. It placed high tariffs on imported goods, making sure that foreign products were more expensive than American products. Most European economies struggled throughout the inter-war years, and much of the weakness of these economies was down to high American tariffs, which reduced the exporting opportunities for the Europeans. This in turn led to a shortage of dollars in Europe, which in turn made it harder for the Europeans to pay off their war debts.

Although several economists could see the problem – and knew that high tariffs would lead to retaliation from Europeans – not only did it prove impossible to reduce tariffs, they were actually increased in 1922 and 1930. Many Europeans felt that the Americans were acting hypocritically. They were demanding open door trading policies from the rest of world, whilst closing their own door and locking it tight.

The Wall Street Crash of October 1929 led to economic disaster across the world, yet once again the United States did little to rescue matters. In June 1933, the London Economic Conference tried to coordinate world economic policies. The US position was indecisive and divided, finally being undermined by Franklin Roosevelt, who saw no reason for the United States to bail out failing European economies.

In fact, the position of the USA as a creditor nation should have provided her with the incentive to ensure international stability. In reality the USA seemed to want to enjoy the fruits of greater world trade without wanting to take responsibility for any of the consequences of American economic policies.

However, the American position must be viewed in the light of its history. No American force had fought outside of the Americas until 1917. The feeling of isolation had become deeply engraved in American minds during the nineteenth century and there was a psychological sense of being removed from the corruption of the Old World, and of wanting to be removed from it.

Many Americans also believed that a change from isolationism would spell social disaster. The United States was effectively an ethnic melting pot, with people from many countries. Removal from Old World affairs allowed these people to live together in harmony. But once the Americans began taking sides, European controversies would surface among European immigrants, leading to European conflicts occurring within the USA.

Finally it must be remembered that US isolationists believed they were right. The United States needed freedom to manoeuvre in order to defend its interests. They believed that the USA should decide for itself whether, when, where and how any foreign adventure should be undertaken. In the meantime, many Americans were convinced that the main priorities for the USA involved domestic rather than foreign policy.

In the 1930s it appeared that the USA became even more isolationist. The Wall Street Crash and the subsequent Great Depression were major disasters for the United States. As unemployment and poverty grew and the breadlines lengthened, the trend to concentrate on domestic issues was even more pronounced. When Franklin Roosevelt made his Inaugural Speech, he mentioned foreign affairs in one general sentence only. There was no role for foreign affairs in the 1936 presidential election either.

Isolationism reached its peak in the mid 1930s when the Neutrality Laws were passed in 1935, 1936 and 1937. Many Americans had come to believe that American involvement in the First World War had been a dreadful mistake, and the Neutrality Laws were designed to prevent a repeat of the events of 1917. From now on, if war broke out anywhere in the world, the United States was not permitted to trade with or lend money to any of the belligerent nations. Neither were US ships to enter into the territorial waters of a belligerent nation, nor were Americans to travel on the ships of a belligerent nation. At a time when there were dark clouds of war on the horizon in Europe, the Americans preferred to close the curtains on the view to the Atlantic.

Yet, in reality, total isolationism was impractical. Woodrow Wilson had argued that the isolationism of the USA was at an end because of the genius of the American people and the growth of American power. As a result of these two factors, he argued, the United States had become a "*determining factor in the history of mankind*" and that meant that the USA could not remain isolated, whether it wanted to or not.

Wilson's successors certainly refused to commit the USA to any foreign involvement. They insisted on total freedom of American action, and would not countenance any form of collective security. However, the United States took part in a whole range of world affairs. These included the expansion of American trade and business in the world, involvement in decisions about German reparations, participation in the non-political activities of the League of Nations, and many efforts to achieve world peace. They even agreed to an extent to limit their freedom of action when they signed up to the Washington Naval Agreements, which curtailed the number of ships the Americans could build vis-à-vis the British, French, Italians and Japanese.

Thus the American position was not really isolationist. Rather it was a position of '*independent interventionism*'. The USA realised that it could not actually retreat from the world. However, it sought an unofficial approach to world affairs, rather than being tied down in any way by official involvement.

This was evident in world economic affairs. The international economic situation after the First World War was very favourable to the growth of American trade. The conflict had disrupted the trade of the Europeans, but had encouraged the rapid growth of American industry as the Americans took over many of the markets that the Europeans were no longer able to supply.

The phrase '*dollar diplomacy*' has been used – often in an accusatory fashion – to describe US foreign policy at this time. The accusation made against the USA is that American businessmen used the support of their government to seek trade and business opportunity regardless of any resultant chaos or rebellion. The Americans were accused of forcing countries to accept trading terms favourable to Americans.

Others have maintained that the growth of American economic relations with other countries was mutually beneficial. The USA sought to bring stability and prosperity to various countries by using dollars rather than using bullets and soldiers. American investment brought several countries into the global economy, notably China and Mexico, and some Americans believed economic expansion would be the new form of imperialism.



There was also the expanding influence of US culture. Soda fountains, nut sundaes, Hollywood films, typewriters and Ford motor cars (*left*) all began to take their place in the everyday life of many other countries. The film became the new missionary, acting as an involuntary advertisement for the American lifestyle. Soon every European was aware of the status symbols of the United States – and this was a situation that the Americans were keen to foster. Many foreigners were eager to copy the Americans – and that led to demand for American products, which once more stimulated trade and economic growth.

This development of American trade and culture abroad gives the lie to American 'isolationism'. The Americans did not retreat from world affairs and diplomacy, only from those aspects of world affairs and diplomacy that they wished to retreat from. Nothing else can explain the foreign policy developed during the 1920s. American presidents believed that the USA would have to increase its trade with the rest of the world, so they devised a foreign policy that would allow the fullest American economic participation without reducing the freedom of the USA to act as it saw fit in international relations.

Private enterprises were encouraged to adopt aspects of American foreign policy, such as Standard Oil, which was given privileges in return for acquiring raw materials (in this case oil) in the Middle East. Several American companies were encouraged to buy up land and / or industry in foreign countries and turn them into areas of the United States abroad. Americans abroad then required the diplomatic protection of their government in Washington – and the American government would offer this protection.

It was one of the great ironies that in the period 1918–1941 – when the American people largely believed that they were withdrawing from world affairs – American participation in global matters increased dramatically. The pioneers of this participation were private individuals and companies. However, they moved into world affairs with the full support of their government in the knowledge that the US Government would do its best to protect them, their profits and American interests regardless of the country in question. To this extent the United States was fully committed to world affairs throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Task

Answer the following questions from the discussion

1. What was the attitude of President Warren Harding towards foreign affairs?
2. Why were many Americans pleased by the Senate's rejection of the peace settlement?
3. Why has isolationism led some to criticise the USA and even blame the Americans for the start of the Second World War?
4. What was the American attitude towards the debts owed to them by their former wartime allies?
5. Why were tariffs imposed on foreign goods entering the USA?
6. Why did these tariffs make it harder for the former allies to pay off their war debts?
7. What was the European attitude towards American tariffs?
8. How does the imposition of tariffs suggest that the USA was acting in an isolationist manner?
9. Why did several Americans believe that any policy other than isolationism would lead to social disaster?
10. Why did the Americans seem to become even more isolationist after 1929?
11. What were the Neutrality Laws and why were they passed?

Task

For all the statements below, decide how *'isolationist'* the statement is, and then place them in some sort of order

1. The feeling of isolationism was deeply ingrained into the American psyche
2. In his inaugural speech, Franklin Roosevelt only mentioned foreign issues once
3. American ships were not allowed to enter the territorial waters of nations at war
4. The USA was too big and powerful – it could not remain isolationist
5. Americans insisted on freedom to act in American interests in the world
6. The USA refused to agree to any form of collective security
7. American world trade and business increased
8. The Americans took part in negotiations over German reparations
9. The Americans signed the Washington Naval Treaties with Britain, France, Japan and Italy
10. The Washington Naval Treaties placed limits on the number of warships in the US Navy
11. The USA would take part in world affairs but would not be tied down by official agreements
12. The USA was accused of dollar diplomacy – that they used influence to enhance trade and profit
13. Some accused the USA of forcing other states to accept trading terms favourable only to the USA
14. American investment abroad allowed some countries to develop their own economies
15. American culture expanded abroad
16. The USA did not retreat from the world, but it only took part in issues in which it had an interest
17. US governments were obliged to help citizens in trouble abroad

To what extent did the USA remain isolated from European affairs?

Following the First World War and the rejection of the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations, most Americans were content to remain apart from European affairs. To citizens of the United States, the problems of Europe had begun in Europe and should be solved in Europe. These problems were of no concern to the USA.

This may have been both clear and obvious to Americans, but it was an attitude that caused great concern to many European countries, especially France. At that time the main concern of the French was security in the event of any future German recovery. By 1930 the French were seeking diplomatic agreements with both the USA and Britain so that France had support in case of renewed German aggression. But the Americans were not willing to go along with this, seeing it as a commitment to France that implied automatic military support of France in the event of any attack on French territory. This implication of automatic support to another country or group of countries was precisely what the Americans were trying to avoid.

However, the Americans were keen to encourage general disarmament across the world, believing that this was the way to secure peace. France had made it perfectly clear that she would only agree to disarm if the USA and Britain agreed to give her the support she desired. As this was not forthcoming, the Geneva Disarmament Conference was certain to fail.

Despite this, the United States could not avoid involvement in European affairs. Americans accepted the need for the economies of Europe to be rebuilt after the First World War, if for no better reason than to ensure a ready market for American goods. Thus the American governments of the 1920s looked to rebuild and reintegrate Germany into the economies of Europe, to reduce French worries by means short of international obligation, and to stabilise all European currencies. This would allow an increase in American exports and increase the flow of American money across Europe.

This economic vision represented sound thinking. However, the economic horizon was clouded by the issue of German reparations and allied war debts. Understandably, Americans who had lent money to allied countries during the war wanted their money back. However, the French and the Italians refused to do this until they received their share of the reparations that were due from the Germans. The Germans insisted there was no way that Germany could afford the huge sums of money demanded from them by the allied countries. Therefore the money was *not* returning to the States. The French – supported by the British – tried to link repayment of debt to reparations received. The Americans refused to accept any link, fearful that a German refusal or inability to pay would cause a French refusal to pay off loans.

In 1922 the Americans called for the repayment of all loans within 25 years, and banned the cancellation of any part of the debt. This was particularly badly received in France, where the Americans were depicted as uncaring and money-grabbing. In the meantime, the Americans had come to the conclusion that the Treaty of Versailles was far too harsh on Germany and should be amended as soon as possible – a policy France was certain to resist.

In 1921 the Allied Reparations Committee had set the total amount for German reparations at about \$33 billion. Each year until 1929 the Germans were to pay \$375 million. After that the figure went up to \$900 million per year. The Germans were horrified at this. Their criticisms were bitter – and many in the USA were sympathetic to the points raised by the Germans. Later international conferences on reparations saw the pre-eminence of Americans, where Charles Dawes (1924) (*overleaf top left*) and Owen Young (1929) (*right*) dominated proceedings, even though they were unofficial delegates.





The Dawes Plan and the Young Plan saw major alterations to German reparations, which were ultimately reduced to \$9 billion from the original \$33 billion. A similar reassessment took place of the debts owed to the USA by the British, the Belgians, the French and the Italians, and by the end of the decade allied indebtedness to the USA was reduced to 43% as the Americans began to realise that they needed to take into account the ability of their former allies to pay. In the end it all proved to be academic as the Great Depression struck.

In 1928 the American Secretary of State – Frank Kellogg (*right*) – joined with the French in the so-called Kellogg-Briand Pact. This document stated that France and the USA would condemn *“recourse to war for the solution of international controversies, and renounce it as an instrument of national policy in their relations with one another”*. It was a pact later offered to other countries – and every sovereign state signed the Pact except for three South American republics.



It was a Pact that was very popular in the United States and many Americans took the viewpoint that such a Pact would have prevented war in 1914. However, it was very idealistic. There was no attempt to prevent the causes of war, and there was no method to deal with disputes between countries. It was as if the Americans were relying on the moral righteousness of their position for the success of the Pact. This was clearly nonsense when a ruthless leader like Adolf Hitler came to power in a strong state like Germany.

There is a strong argument that American diplomacy in Europe lacked substance as a result of the unwillingness of the United States to commit itself to European affairs. In many ways the Europeans were better off in their attempts to make the League of Nations function, or to achieve collective security via the Locarno Pact. Nevertheless American diplomatic activity in Europe was far from leaving the Europeans totally alone to sort out European problems by themselves.

Task

1. What was the attitude of ordinary Americans to European affairs immediately after the First World War?
2. What was the main concern of the French after the First World War?
3. Why were the Americans unwilling to grant the French a promise of US support in the event of a future attack on France?
4. What did the Americans consider to be the best way to secure world peace?
5. What was the French viewpoint on this issue?
6. Many history books claim that the decision by Adolf Hitler to walk out of the talks on disarmament ended the conference. What evidence is there to suggest that Hitler's decision would have made little difference?
7. Why did the Americans want to see European economies rebuilt after the First World War?
8. What was the economic inter-relationship between the USA, Germany and France between the two world wars?
9. Why was money owing to the USA not returned from Europe?
10. Why did the Americans refuse to link the repayment of war debts with the German payment of reparations?
11. What did the Americans announce in 1922 with regard to war debts?
12. What was the total amount of reparations expected from the Germans?
13. In what ways were attitudes towards Germany different in the USA than in France?
14. Why is it strange that the two plans in the 1920s to alleviate the reparations issue are named after the Americans Dawes and Young?
15. Why did the two plans prove to be irrelevancies?
16. What was the Kellogg-Briand Pact and what were its weaknesses?
17. Outline the arguments in support of the view that the Americans certainly did not leave Europe alone to sort out its own problems.

To what extent did the USA remain isolated from Latin America?

The term '*isolationism*' to describe American foreign policy would have puzzled most states of Central and South America. In the Western hemisphere the basis of all US foreign policy was never isolationism. Instead the Monroe Doctrine ruled supreme.

Based on the interpretation offered by Theodore Roosevelt at the turn of the century, the Americans claimed that they did not wish to intervene in any American republic, desiring only peace, order, stability and justice. However, in reality the Americans reserved to themselves the right to intervene in American republics if '*peace*' or '*stability*' were not adjudged by the USA to be sufficiently good enough.

The greatest amount of American intervention in Latin America between the wars was economic rather than military. American business expanded rapidly in Latin America, and Americans invested heavily in such commodities and services as electricity, railways, oil, bananas and sugar. As far as the USA was concerned, they were acting as good neighbours, and seeking to assist the economic development of other American republics.

At the same time there was a gradual withdrawal of American military forces from Latin American countries, though US forces occupied Nicaragua (1912–1925 and 1926–1933) and the Dominican Republic (1916–1924), whilst US Marines effectively governed Haiti (1915–1934).

The greatest concern of the USA in Latin America was that a left-wing socialist or communist regime would come to power in one of the republics. They believed this would most likely come about if a country descended into instability. In order to prevent this instability, a strong man was needed to keep order in each of the countries of Latin America. In Nicaragua, for example, the Somoza family was helped and kept in power by the Americans, because the family promised to end all supposed communist activity within Nicaragua.

However, in looking for the strong man in each republic in order to suppress left-wing activities, the Americans were guilty of ignoring the methods used by that strong man. For instance, President Machado of Cuba kept control by a combination of brutality and corruption. He became so unpopular in Cuba, that a left-wing coup took place in 1933. The Americans helped to put this coup down, and then replaced Machado with an army general. General Batista was to remain in power in Cuba until 1959, supported by the Americans, despite his dictatorial and military rule.

A similar type of man was put into power in the Dominican Republic after 1930. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the much-lauded American principle of freedom and democracy for all peoples was fine in Latin America, provided that freedom and democracy led to the '*right sort*' of government. If not, the '*right sort*' of government had to be imposed on the people concerned.

To some degree the Americans had reason to worry. Much of Latin America was politically unstable. By 1933 every country had experienced some kind of revolutionary upheaval except for Colombia, Venezuela and Uruguay. The threat of war between Latin American states caused anxieties in Washington, and often the Americans moved in to mediate in a dispute between Latin American countries. Stability was considered vital to US interests, not least because an unstable country might encourage European intervention, which would be contrary to the dictates of the Monroe Doctrine. However, the promotion of stability in Latin America did not necessarily mean that the United States worked for the region to enjoy the benefits of American liberal democratic ideals.

During the 1920s and 1930s American money poured into Latin America. Often this led to mutually beneficial economic relationships between the USA and a Latin American country – but, at times, the Latin American state felt keenly that the relationship established was not an equal one, and that the United

States sought to exploit them. Cries of “*Yankee Imperialism*” could be heard from some states at some times (most notably from Mexico and Argentina).

The Americans have been accused, most notably by the Russians during the Cold War, of seeking to dominate Latin America by the use of money and trade. If these methods failed, then the Americans supported revolutions or instigated military measures to impose a more friendly government, more amenable to American domination.

This is harsh. In 1933 Cordell Hull supported a resolution at the Pan-American Conference in Uruguay that no state had the right to intervene in the affairs of another state, thus effectively repudiating the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. The Americans brought to an end the Platt Amendment of 1903, and the Marines were withdrawn from Haiti. A treaty signed with Panama in 1936 agreed to joint US-Panamanian responsibility for the defence of the Panama Canal, and ended the right of the USA to act on its own in Panama.

It needs also to be remembered that the Americans in the 1930s were keen to maintain friendly relations with Latin American countries. The threats from the increasingly aggressive states of Germany and Japan were perceived to be real, and the Monroe Doctrine might need to be invoked. This would be much easier if Latin America supported the American rather than the Japanese or German position.

In 1938 the Declaration of Lima stated that if the peace or security of any American state were threatened, then the American states would ‘*make effective their solidarity*’. This was effectively collective security and a commitment to other states – precisely what isolationism was meant to preclude. However, the Declaration of Lima marks a decided success of American foreign policy. The states of Latin America had been persuaded to put aside their distrust of US motives and to work with the United States in a common cause. This was to make the job of the USA in the Second World War so much easier as it meant that the Americans did not have to watch their backs as their troops fought in the Pacific and in Europe.

Task

Consider the following and then decide its significance in American foreign policy in Latin America:

- The Monroe Doctrine
- The right to intervene in states where peace and / or stability were under threat
- American investments in Latin America
- The use of American military forces in Latin America
- The ‘*strong man*’
- The ‘*right sort of government*’
- Revolutionary upheaval in Latin America
- ‘*Yankee Imperialism*’
- The end of the Platt Agreement
- Joint responsibility for the defence of the Panama Canal
- The Declaration of Lima

Judgement

Could American policy towards Latin America ever be described as isolationist?

Conclusions

Isolationism as a concept was fine in theory, but for a country with the size, power and influence of the United States it was impossible to achieve anything close to isolationism. In fact the Americans never stated that they wanted no contact with the rest of the world – they merely wanted to avoid any form of commitment to or entanglement with other countries.

To an extent they succeeded, though this success was a double-edged sword. In the event of a dispute or conflict the Americans refused to become embroiled – something that was not lost on aggressive dictators like Hitler who assumed that the USA would do nothing even in the face of considerable provocation.

This is the crux of the matter, however. Attempting to avoid the entanglements of others can only fully succeed if others avoid entanglements with you. By the late 1930s the USA faced a dilemma – would not continued expansion by either Germany or Japan threaten the position of the United States, thus forcing the Americans to become entangled? As the decade drew to an end it was a question that had not been resolved.

But isolationism is a misleading term in any case. A country like the USA, with its interest in trade and cultural links and its financial commitment to other countries, could not afford to ignore world affairs, and there is no evidence to suggest that the USA sought to do so.

Some have argued that isolationism meant that the USA avoided all forms of legal commitment by treaty to other countries through formal alliance. This, they argue, was achieved during the 1920s and 1930s. Yet even here the case is not certain.

Whilst the Kellogg-Briand Pact might be described as nebulous and vague, committing nobody to anything, the same cannot be said of the Washington Naval Agreements. This limited US naval construction, committing the USA to an agreed ratio of warships compared with other states. This was later followed with a further commitment after the London Conference of 1930, where cruisers and destroyers were limited. Finally the Treaty of Lima in 1938 effectively committed the USA to a system of collective security that differed in no essential manner from the collective security attempted elsewhere, such as the Locarno Pact in Europe.

If US isolationism can be defined as the Americans choosing when and where to commit themselves on individual issues with individual countries or groups of countries, then the USA was isolationist in the 1920s and 1930s. If it means that the USA was not as willing to express their views to other states as forcefully as they might have done, then the USA was an isolationist country. But defining the term as an attempt by the United States to withdraw from world affairs is not just an inaccuracy, it does no justice to the memory of those Americans who worked throughout the world to better themselves, strengthen their country or make the world just that little bit safer.

Timeline

Timeline of American History c1920–1929

Year	Domestic Policy	Foreign Policy
1919	Prohibition introduced	Treaty of Versailles
1920	Warren Harding elected President; Volstead Act defined what was meant by intoxicating liquor; Palmer Raids; Clarke and Tyler recruited to the Ku Klux Klan	US rejection of the peace treaties; American troops withdrawn from Russia
1921	Sacco and Vanzetti found guilty of murder; Emergency Immigration Act	Allied Reparations Committee set German reparations at \$33 billion
1922	Congress passed the Fordney-McCumber Tariff Act; Hiram Wesley Evans became leader of the Ku Klux Klan	Washington Naval Agreement
1923	Warren Harding died, succeeded by Calvin Coolidge; Agricultural Credits Act passed	
1924	Johnson-Reed Immigration Act	Dawes Plan; US forces withdrawn from the Dominican Republic
1925	Parade of the Ku Klux Klan in Washington; 'Monkey' Trial in Tennessee	US forces withdrawn from Nicaragua
1926	End of the Florida Land Boom	US forces occupy Nicaragua
1927	Sacco and Vanzetti executed; First 'talkie'	
1928	Herbert Hoover elected President; Establishment of Academy Awards (Oscars)	Kellogg-Briand Pact
1929	Wall Street Crash	Young Plan

USA c1920–1929: Answers to tasks

The Impact of the First World War on the USA

1. How did the following impact upon American life?
 - **The Council of National Defence:** *Made preparations for war in advance of the American declaration of war.*
 - **The Selective Service Act:** *Introduced military conscription.*
 - **The War Industries Board:** *Set up to organise purchases for the US armed forces.*
 - **The Food Administration:** *Created in 1917 to make sure not only that there was enough food for American needs but also that there was sufficient surplus food that could be shipped to Britain.*
 - **The Committee on Public Information:** *Created to wage a propaganda war against Germany and German allies.*
 - **The Espionage and the Sedition Acts:** *Banned criticism of the war effort.*
2. How did the First World War affect the following?
 - **Immigrants in the United States:** *Victims of a backlash against 'aliens'.*
 - **US finances:** *Cost of the war amounted to \$35.5 billion.*
 - **Attitudes towards women:** *Changed as a result of the war-work undertaken by women.*
 - **Trade and employment:** *Trade was boosted during the war, but declined afterwards. Unemployment also rose after the war as soldiers were demobilised.*

The Republican Party

All the statements made are reasons for the Republican success in the 1920s. The student's opinions as to which were the more significant reasons will need to be explained.

The Economic Boom

- **The population of the United States:** *Provided a large domestic market for American products.*
- **The development of the infrastructure in the USA:** *Provided a good communications network to transport goods throughout the USA.*
- **The natural resources in the USA:** *Plentiful supplies freed the USA from the need to import these goods.*
- **The First World War:** *Demand for military supplies stimulated American industry and the USA benefited from the destruction of its main European rivals.*
- **The 'American Dream':** *Encouraged Americans to believe that if they worked hard they could achieve wealth.*
- **Laissez-faire policies:** *Meant US businesses could operate free from government 'interference'.*
- **Republican economic policies:** *Government tariff policy and tax cuts benefited US businesses.*
- **Yellow Dog contracts:** *These were no-strike agreements which allowed management great control over its workforce.*
- **The assembly line:** *Allowed the rate of production to be set at a constant rate, allowing for faster production.*
- **Business Management:** *This allowed US businesses to maximise output.*
- **Large corporations:** *Benefited from the economies of scale and integration.*
- **Advertising and marketing:** *Brought awareness of available products and encouraged purchase.*
- **The growth of credit:** *Allowed more people into the market for various products that they could not afford outright.*

The Weaknesses of the US Economy in the 1920s

This task is self-explanatory. Assess students on the quality of their presentation.

Introduction of Prohibition

Indicative Content

Arguments should include:

- **Health reasons**
- **Religious reasons**
- **Social reasons** *(men spending money on drink rather than their families)*
- **Patriotic reasons** *(the war effort and links to Germany).*

The Increase in Gangsterism

1. Why did organised crime start to supply illegal alcohol to various outlets?
The attraction for the gangsters was the lucrative profits that could be made from the illegal supply and sale of alcohol.
2. How did the gangsters keep the forces of law and order from interfering in their activities?
The lucrative profits made from illegal alcohol enabled the gangsters to control politicians and law enforcers.
3. What was Al Capone's attitude towards being a gangster?
He said he was merely a businessman, supplying people with a product in demand.
4. Why was the whole American legal system being undermined?
The number of Americans willing to drink illegally meant the law was making criminals of so many American citizens, who were thus prepared to side with the gangsters rather than the law.

The Failure of Prohibition

Indicative Content

Not enough money was given to enforce the law or pay for sufficient law enforcers; the impossibility of patrolling the entire borders and coastline of the USA; abuse of loopholes, such as provision on medical grounds, and the use of industrial alcohol; the corruption and bribery from the vast profits made; the attitude of many ordinary Americans and their willingness to defy the law; division in the 'dry' lobby; congressional unwillingness to apply more stringent enforcement; the contradiction between government enforcement of Prohibition and the belief in laissez-faire politics.

The Impact of Immigration

1. Why did so many immigrants settle in the larger American cities?
Most did not have enough money to start out as farmers and many were attracted by the wages and / or the ease of settling into an area where previous immigrants from their homelands had already settled.
2. Why did locally-born Americans consider immigrants to be a threat?
They considered the immigrants as a threat, either to their job opportunities or to wage levels.
3. How did immigrants benefit from American democracy?
Candidates for election would seek the immigrant vote by providing economic and social support for them.
4. How was immigration and Prohibition linked?
Some Americans blamed the production of 'evil drink' on Italian, German and Irish immigrants.
5. Why were immigrants easy scapegoats for social ills in the USA?
The tendency of the immigrants to live in their own districts, making little effort to integrate, made them easy targets.
6. What 'un-American' ideas were blamed on immigrants?
Anarchism and Socialism.

The Red Scare

- **The Immigration Act of 1917:** Mention should be made of the provision of this act.
- **American distaste for Communism:** Mention should include comment on the difference between the ideas of Communism and American values.
- **The bomb attacks:** Some comment needs to be made on the likely psychological reaction of Palmer.
- **The Palmer Raids and the methods used:** Comment should be made on the illegal aspect of these raids, and the similarity between the methods used by Palmer and the Communists in Russia. Possibly also of Palmer's desire for the Democratic Party's nomination of himself as presidential candidate.
- **The number of acquittals following on from the Raids:** This should concentrate on the lack of evidence and therefore of the mistaken beliefs of Palmer.
- **The failure of the Communist Revolution to occur on 20th May:** This made Palmer look foolish.

Sacco and Vanzetti

1 – C 2 – B 3 – D 4 – A

The Restriction of Immigration

1890	New quotas of immigrants in 1924 were based on the 1890 census, which discriminated against Eastern Europeans.
1910	New quotas of immigrants in 1921 were based on the 1910 census, which also discriminated against Eastern Europeans.
1921	The Emergency Immigration Act (see also 1910)
1924	The Johnson-Reed Immigration Act (see also 1890)
1927	New law stating that only 150,000 immigrants could enter the USA per year, based on the ' <i>national origins of the American people of 1920</i> '. Japanese and Chinese immigrants were excluded altogether.

The Ku Klux Klan

1. Explain the link between the following and the history of the Ku Klux Klan.
 - **Mass Immigration:** *American fears and distrust of foreign immigrants helped support the KKK.*
 - **The reversion to isolationism in foreign policy:** *The belief that the USA should concentrate on American issues helped the KKK.*
 - **Populism:** *This had united poor white and black Americans, and caused fear among the white Establishment and led to a re-emergence of white supremacist attitudes.*
 - **William Simmons:** *The founder of the new KKK in 1915.*
 - **Stone Mountain, Georgia:** *The place of birth of the new KKK.*
 - **The Increase in Benevolent Societies:** *This gave Simmons the idea for the raison d'être of the KKK.*
 - **Edward Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler:** *Publicists whose PR work increased the membership of the KKK.*
 - **'Traditional American values':** *The basis on which the KKK declared its position.*
 - **Increasing violence:** *This grew as some elements of the KKK were more 'active' in their approach to the defence of traditional values.*
 - **The attitude of the forces of law and order:** *Many turned a blind eye to KKK activities or even joined in.*
 - **Newspaper articles and Congressional hearings:** *Although intended to expose the KKK they actually provided free publicity and a boost to membership.*
 - **Hiram Wesley Evans:** *Second leader of the KKK after Simmons.*
 - **The 'wave of terror':** *The 'attack' on those who did not have 'traditional American values'.*
 - **Growing Female Independence:** *Abhorrent to the KKK as it liberated women from their traditional roles.*
 - **Earl Mayfield and Klan strength:** *The KKK won several local elections and KKK member Mayfield was elected Senator for Texas.*
 - **The marches in Washington DC:** *Designed to show KKK strength, though the second march was less popular than the first.*
 - **David Curtis Stephenson:** *KKK man Stephenson was convicted of the rape and murder of a 28-year-old secretary.*
 - **The Pennsylvania Rebels:** *This breakaway group exposed many of the methods of the KKK in court.*
 - **Immigration Laws:** *These had reduced fears about immigrants and reduced support for the KKK.*
 - **Communism:** *The chosen new 'enemy' for the KKK in the 1930s.*
2. What do you think was the main reason for the decline in the strength of the Ku Klux Klan by 1929?
All the statements made are reasons for the decline in the popularity of the KKK by 1929. The student's opinions as to which were the more significant reasons will need to be explained.

American society in the 1920s

- **The Lost Generation:** *Those disillusioned by the First World War and the 'botched' peace settlement, yet who laid the basis for modern American literature whilst providing a significant insight into American life at the time.*
- **Harlem and the NAACP:** *There was an African-American cultural renaissance centred on Harlem in New York, whilst the NAACP encouraged the work of young African-American writers.*
- **The growth of the Ku Klux Klan:** *The growth of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s was a sign of the racial problems facing African-Americans.*

- **KDKA and radio broadcasting:** These allowed small towns and remote rural areas to hear up-to-date news, music, plays and comedy shows. Radio broadcasting was sponsored by private businesses, which meant that the growth of radio was matched by the growth of advertising.
- **Hollywood and the Oscars:** Both were means of influencing Americans and world opinions.
- **Mass spectator sport:** As real wages increased, people had more disposable income for leisure activities. This encouraged the growth of mass spectator sports.
- **The 'flapper':** Young women began to look towards an independent lifestyle where they did not necessarily have to look for a husband. There were greater employment opportunities in the 1920s as well, which allowed women far more freedom than previously had been possible.
- **Sex and Sexuality:** The decade saw an increase in sexuality as birth control methods were more extensively practised.
- **Beauty products and beauty care:** The biggest growth industry for females was that of cosmetics. Beauty salons began to appear across the USA, and some products became household names.
- **The 19th Amendment:** This gave American women the right to vote.
- **Christian Fundamentalism:** This involved accepting the words of the Bible literally and acknowledging that one's lifestyle should reflect the word of God.
- **John Scopes:** Arrested and convicted for teaching Darwin's Theory of Evolution
- **The 'good old days':** An erroneous belief that life was better in the past.

US Isolationism between the world wars

1. What was the attitude of President Warren Harding towards foreign affairs?
He believed in the traditional position of the USA in world affairs. This meant rejecting any form of collective security. The United States would look after its own destiny, and avoid any commitments abroad.
2. Why were many Americans pleased by the Senate's rejection of the peace settlement?
By 1920 many Americans had come to the conclusion that involvement in the First World War had been a huge mistake and were determined to revert to traditional US policy and keep out of world affairs.
3. Why has isolationism led some to criticise the USA and even blame the Americans for the start of the Second World War?
They have accused the Americans of abdicating a crucial world responsibility. It seemed then that the USA was in some way tacitly condoning the expansionism of Japan, Italy and Germany because the USA stood on the sidelines and did nothing.
4. What was the American attitude towards the debts owed to them by their former wartime allies?
The Americans took a strict line with war debts, insisting that its former wartime allies pay them off in full.
5. Why were tariffs imposed on foreign goods entering the USA?
To protect American industry and the domestic market from foreign competition.
6. Why did these tariffs make it harder for the former allies to pay off their war debts?
This made European exports expensive and reduced European trade with the USA which led to a shortage of dollars in Europe, which in turn made it harder for the Europeans to pay off their war debts.
7. What was the European attitude towards American tariffs?
Many Europeans felt that the Americans were acting hypocritically. They were demanding open door trading policies from the rest of world, whilst closing their own door and locking it tight.
8. How does the imposition of tariffs suggest that the USA was acting in an isolationist manner?
The USA seemed to want to enjoy the fruits of greater world trade without wanting to take responsibility for any of the consequences of American economic policies.
9. Why did several Americans believe that any policy other than isolationism would lead to social disaster?
The United States was effectively an ethnic melting pot, with people from many countries. Removal from Old World affairs allowed these people to live together in harmony. But once the Americans began taking sides, European controversies would surface among European immigrants, leading to European conflicts occurring within the USA.
10. Why did the Americans seem to become even more isolationist after 1929? *The Wall Street Crash and Great Depression tended to make the USA concentrate on its own domestic economic problems.*
11. What were the Neutrality Laws and why were they passed?
Many Americans had come to believe that American involvement in the First World War had been a dreadful mistake, and the Neutrality Laws were designed to prevent a repeat of the events of 1917. From now on, if war broke out anywhere in the world, the United States was not permitted to trade with or lend money to any of the belligerent nations. Neither were US ships to enter into the territorial waters of a belligerent nation, nor were Americans to travel on the ships of a belligerent nation.

The 'isolationist statements'

Indicative Content

The most 'isolationist statements' are: 1, 2, 3, 6 and 13. The remainder tend to suggest some form of American involvement in world affairs.

Isolationism and Europe

1. What was the attitude of ordinary Americans to European affairs immediately after the First World War?
Most Americans were content to remain apart from European affairs.
2. What was the main concern of the French after the First World War?
Security in the event of any future German recovery.
3. Why were the Americans unwilling to grant the French a promise of US support in the event of a future attack on France?
The Americans saw it as a commitment to France that implied automatic military support of France in the event of any attack on French territory.
4. What did the Americans consider to be the best way to secure world peace?
General disarmament across the world.
5. What was the French viewpoint on this issue?
France would only agree to disarm if the USA and Britain agreed to give her the support she desired.
6. Many history books claim that the decision by Adolf Hitler to walk out of the talks on disarmament ended the conference. What evidence is there to suggest that Hitler's decision would have made little difference?
The French position and the unlikelihood of gaining British and American support meant that the French were unlikely to accept disarmament proposals regardless of Hitler's position.
7. Why did the Americans want to see European economies rebuilt after the First World War?
This would allow an increase in American exports and increase the flow of American money across Europe.
8. What was the economic inter-relationship between the USA, Germany and France between the two world wars?
The Germans paid reparations to the French, who in turn would use that money to repay their war debts to the USA.
9. Why was money owing to the USA not returned from Europe?
The Germans insisted there was no way that Germany could afford the huge sums of money demanded from them by the allied countries, so the system failed.
10. Why did the Americans refuse to link the repayment of war debts with the German payment of reparations?
Because this meant they might give the French and British an excuse not to repay their war debts.
11. What did the Americans announce in 1922 with regard to war debts?
The Americans called for the repayment of all loans within 25 years, and banned the cancellation of any part of the debt.
12. What was the total amount of reparations expected from the Germans?
\$33 billion.
13. In what way were attitudes towards Germany different in the USA than in France?
The Americans were more sympathetic because they were less concerned about their security than the French.
14. Why is it strange that the two plans in the 1920s to alleviate the reparations issue are named after the Americans Dawes and Young?
Because both Dawes and Young were not official delegates to the conferences that agreed the plans.
15. Why did the two plans prove to be irrelevancies?
In the end it all proved to be academic as the Great Depression struck.
16. What was the Kellogg-Briand Pact and what were its weaknesses?
It was a pact that banned war as a means of international relations, but it had no mechanism to prevent or stop war.
17. Outline the arguments in support of the view that the Americans certainly did not leave Europe alone to sort out its own problems.
Involvement in agreements with the Europeans, such as the Kellogg Pact, increased economic ties with Europe, the link between the USA and European war debts / reparations.

Isolationism and Latin America

- **The Monroe Doctrine:** *A traditional aspect of US foreign policy that attempted to prevent European interference in Latin America.*
- **The right to intervene in states where peace and / or stability were under threat:** *This was the Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine and meant the USA would intervene in such states before European states could become involved.*
- **American investments in Latin America:** *These encouraged the growth of Latin American economies – and American profits.*
- **The use of American military forces in Latin America:** *These were gradually withdrawn from Latin American states before 1939.*
- **The ‘strong man’:** *This was an American plan to prevent any Latin American state falling to instability or left-wing government.*
- **The ‘right sort of government’:** *Any form of government that was stable and not left-wing.*
- **Revolutionary upheaval in Latin America:** *By 1933 all but three Latin American states had experienced revolutionary upheaval, which concerned the USA.*
- **‘Yankee Imperialism’:** *The concept that the USA use economics and business to further their exploitation of Latin American states.*
- **The end of the Platt Agreement:** *This ended the American ‘protection’ of Cuba.*
- **Joint responsibility for the defence of the Panama Canal:** *This ended sole US responsibility for the defence of the canal.*
- **The Declaration of Lima:** *Effectively a system of collective responsibility among American states.*

Indicative Content

It is unlikely that any student would argue that the Americans were isolationist in Latin America. However, the key to this judgement is in the validity of the proffered argument.