

2Q The American Dream: reality and illusion, 1945–1980

This option provides for a study in depth of the challenges faced by the USA at home and abroad as it emerged from the Second World War as a Superpower. For many Americans, post-war prosperity realised the 'American dream' but the prosperity was not shared by all and significant problems at home and abroad challenged the extent to which the 'American dream' was a reality. It explores concepts and ideas such as American identity at home and abroad, anti-communism, social equality, ethnic identities and federal versus states' rights. It also encourages students to reflect on the nature of democracy in a pluralist society, political protest and the power of the media.

Part one: prosperity, inequality and Superpower status, 1945–1963

Truman and Post-war America, 1945–1952

- The United States in 1945 and the legacies of the world war: the powers of the presidency; the main political parties; post-war prosperity; regional, ethnic and social divisions
- The USA as a Superpower: Truman's character and policies; post-war peace making; the Cold War and 'containment' in Europe and Asia; the response to the rise of Communism in Asia
- Truman and post-war reconstruction: the economy; political divisions and domestic problems; the rise of McCarthyism
- African-Americans in North and South: the impact of the Second World War; campaigns for Civil Rights; the responses of the federal and state authorities

Eisenhower: tranquility and crisis, 1952–1960

- The presidency: Eisenhower's personality and the policies of 'dynamic conservatism'; Nixon as Vice-President; the Republican Party; the end of McCarthyism
- The growth of the American economy in the 1950s and the impact of the 'consumer society'
- The USA and the Cold War: Superpower rivalry and conflict with the USSR; responses to developments in Western and Eastern Europe; reactions to the rise of Communism in Asia; responses to crises in the Middle East
- African-Americans in North and South: the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement; the policies and attitudes of the main political parties; the responses of the state and federal authorities

John F Kennedy and the 'New Frontier', 1960–1963

- The presidential election of 1960 and reasons for Kennedy's victory; the policies and personalities of the Kennedy administration; the ideas behind the 'New Frontier'
- Challenges to American power: the legacy of crises over Berlin and relations with Khrushchev; the challenge of Castro's Cuba; deepening involvement in Vietnam
- African-Americans in North and South: the rise of the Civil Rights Movement; the opponents of Civil Rights, including within the Democratic Party; Kennedy's policies in response to the pressures for change
- The United States by 1963: its position as a world power; economic prosperity; the growing pressures for social change from women and youth

Part two: challenges to the American Dream, 1963–1980 (A-level only)

The Johnson Presidency, 1963–1968 (A-level only)

- Johnson as President: personality and policies; his pursuit of the ‘Great Society’; the impact of the Kennedy legacy; economic developments
- Maintaining American world power: escalation of the war in Vietnam; relations between the USA and its Western allies
- African-Americans in North and South: developments in the Civil Rights Movement; Johnson’s role in passing Civil Rights legislation; the impact of change including urban riots
- Social divisions and protest movements: education and youth; feminism; radicalisation of African-Americans; anti-war movements; the role of the media

Republican reaction: the Nixon Presidency, 1968–1974 (A-level only)

- The Presidential election of 1968 and the reasons for Nixon’s victory: divisions within the Democratic Party; the personalities and policies of the Nixon administration
- The restoration of conservative social policies; the reaction to protest movements and forces of social change; economic change and the end of the post-war boom
- The limits of American world power: peace negotiations and the continuation of the war in Vietnam and Cambodia; the influence of Kissinger on US policies towards the USSR, Latin America and China
- The Watergate Affair and its aftermath: the role of Congress; the resignation of the President; Nixon’s political legacy

The USA after Nixon, 1974–1980 (A-level only)

- Ford and Carter as presidents: responses to social divisions; political corruption and the loss of national self-confidence
- The position of the USA as a world power: the final withdrawal from Vietnam; relations with the USSR and China; the response to crises in the Middle East; Iran and Afghanistan
- African-Americans in North and South: the impact of civil rights legislation; change and continuity in the ‘New South’
- The USA by 1980: its position as a Superpower; the extent of social and economic change; the reasons for Reagan’s victory in the presidential election.

2R The Cold War, c1945–1991

This option provides for the study in depth of the evolving course of international relations during an era of tension between communist and capitalist powers which threatened nuclear Armageddon. It explores concepts such as communism and anti-communism, aggression and détente and also encourages students to reflect on the power of modern military technology, what hastens confrontation and what forces promote peace in the modern world.

Part one: to the brink of Nuclear War: international relations, c1945–1963

The Origins of the Cold War, c1945–1949

- US, British and USSR relations in 1945: conflicting ideologies; tensions at Yalta; relations between Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill; the breakdown of the Grand Alliance at Potsdam; relations between Stalin, Truman and Attlee