COMPONENT 1 - NON-BRITISH STUDY IN DEPTH 1H. THE USA: A NATION OF CONTRASTS, 1910-1929





KEY QUESTION 2 : Religion and race



Was America a country of religious and racial intolerance during this period?

How influential was religious fundamentalism in the USA in this period?

"If anyone wants to teach that God-forsaken hell-born, bastard theory of evolution, then let him...
but do not expect the Christian people of this country to go for the teaching of a rotten, stinking
professor who gets up there and teaches our children to forsake God and makes our schools a
clearing-house for their God-forsaken dirty politics"

Billy Sunday, a fundamentalist preacher, in a sermon in 1925

The **Bible Belt** was a part of rural America in the south east, where very strict Christians lived. They were descended from people who had come to America hundreds of years ago to escape religious persecution. For Americans who lived in towns and cities religion was becoming less important. During the 1920s there was increasing tension between 'big city', prosperous, urban America and 'small town', farming, rural America as immortalised in "American Gothic" which was painted by Grant Wood in 1930.

Most Americans considered themselves to be church-going and 'god-fearing', however the Bible Belt version of Christianity tended to be Protestant and they felt threatened by increasing numbers of Catholics and Jews coming into the country from southern and eastern Europe, as well as the looser morals and consumerism of the 'Jazz Age' which they saw as taking young people away from the rural life of hard work, saving and clean living. There were two important movements within the Bible Belt inspired by what they saw as the threat of immigration and the people of the towns and cities turning their back on religion:

- revivalists who wanted to increase Church attendance
- **fundamentalists** who believed that the Bible, in particular the Old Testament, was literally true; they set up the World's Christian Fundamentals Association in 1919 which is how their followers got their name.

These people were often keen supporters of Prohibition and the Klan. In the 'Bible Belt' states they had a lot of influence in state politics which led to some states banning indecent swimming costumes, kissing in public, gambling on Sundays and contraception advice.

Preachers used the medium of radio to spread their message further in the 1920s. For example, Aimee Semple McPherson quickly gained a large following for her radio show 'Four Square Gospel Hour' which was broadcast from the Angeles Temple in Los Angeles, California. She built the temple using \$1 million dollars she had raised herself. It seated 5,200 people. Other preachers toured their religious message, like reformed alcoholic Billy Sunday who told people to follow the Bible and give up the 'demon drink'.

One of the most contentious subjects was about where humans had come from originally. The Bible said that God created the world and everything in it in six days, which meant that the Earth was only 6,000 years old. In the 19th century, naturalist Charles Darwin developed the **Theory of Evolution** which said that life was shaped by a process of natural selection, which meant that certain species would survive and thrive while others died out and that this process took place slowly over millions and millions of years. **Creationists** believed that Darwin's theory that Man evolved from apes was a direct attack on their fundamentalist beliefs.

Fundamentalists set up the Anti-Evolution League to control education in 1924. As one



fundamentalist writer put it, "We cannot have a system of education that destroys the religious faith of our children". Six states in the Bible Belt banned the teaching of evolution in their schools. The Governor of Tennessee, one of the states that imposed the ban explained that, "The anti-evolution law is a popular protest against an irreligious tendency to exalt so-called science and deny the Bible".

John Scopes, a Biology teacher, was put on trial in Tennessee for teaching evolution in 1925. He was a member of a group who wanted to modernise education. He deliberately taught evolution in front of the Head Teacher. His trial was broadcast live on national radio and was followed closely by the national newspapers. They called it the **Monkey Trial** because it became a public argument about whether or not humans were descended from apes.



Source 1: Biology teacher John T. Scopes in 1925

John Scopes had been encouraged to break the creationism law by the Civil Liberties Union in New York. The trial was held in the small Bible Belt town of Dayton in Tennessee. Scopes was defended by Clarence Darrow one of USA's most famous lawyers. One of the main prosecution witness was fundamentalist and experienced politician William Jennings Bryan, a former Democratic presidential candidate (between 1896 and 1908, and Secretary of State under President Wilson between 1913 and 1917). The World Christian Fundamentalist Association had asked Bryan to take part in the case because, "It is the greatest opportunity ever presented to educate the public and will accomplish more than ten years' campaigning".

Unfortunately for Bryan, Darrow used his cross-examination to highlight the areas of fundamentalist beliefs that many Americans would find difficult to support. For example

DARROW "You have given considerable study to the Bible, haven't you, Mr Bryan?"

BRYAN "Yes, sir, I have tried to..."

DARROW "Do you claim that everything in the Bible should be literally interpreted?"

BRYAN "I believe everything in the Bible should be accepted as it is given there..."

Darrow followed this up by asking specifically about Bryan's views on certain Bible stories, like the Flood and Jonah and the Whale. In particular Darrow focused on Bryan's views on the Creation story. For example:



DARROW "Do you think the earth was made in six days?"

BRYAN "Not six days of 24 hours... My impression is they were periods..."

DARROW "Now, if you call those 'periods', they may have been a very long time"

BRYAN "They might have been"

DARROW "The creation might have been going on for a very long time?"

BRYAN "It might have continued for millions of years"

In the end the judge had to stop Darrow's humiliating two hour cross examination of Bryan's ignorance of even the most basic science.

Media coverage convinced many Americans that the views of the Fundamentalists were ridiculous. For example, the Baltimore Sun newspaper reported in July 1925, "Bryan's face flushed under Mr Darrow's searching words and when one stumped him he took refuge in his faith and either refused to answer directly or said in effect: 'The Bible says it: it must be true''.

Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100 which he was never made to pay. The Tennessee Supreme Court overruled the judgement a year later. Bryan died suddenly not long after the trial from a heart attack. Anti-Evolution laws were not repealed until the 1960s, and only because the teaching of religion was not allowed in state schools.

How racist was the USA in this period?

CASE STUDY 1: the treatment of Native Americans

"Any policy for Indians based on the notion that they can or should be kept permanently isolated from other Americans is bound to fail."

From the Meriam Report published in 1928

Native Americans were referred to at the time, and incorrectly, as 'Indians' because Columbus thought he had landed in India when he had actually landed in America. Native Americans were treated badly over several centuries, driven off their land in the east to roam further and further west. Their nomadic lifestyle and nature-based religious beliefs led to them being considered inferior to white Americans.

Under Article 1 of the US Constitution only Native Americans who paid taxes were recognised as citizens, which meant that if they did not pay taxes they could not vote or own land. They could also become citizens by joining the Army or marrying an American citizen. The 14th Amendment to the Constitution said that anybody born in the USA was a US citizen but this was not applied to Native Americans as they were considered to have been born into their tribal nations rather than into the USA.

After the Indian wars of the 19th century Native Americans were restricted to living on federal government reservations. The 1887 Dawes Act gave the President the power to divide up and give away Native American land. This led to a reduction in the amount of land lived on by Native Americans from 138 million acres in 1887 to 48 million acres in 1934. All of the rest of their land was sold off to railroad companies, mining and manufacturing industries or was set aside for national parks and military bases.

Attitudes began to change after 12,000 Native Americans fought and died in the First World War. The 1920s saw several investigations into the lives of Native Americans to help improve them. The 1924 Indian Citizenship Act (AKA the Snyder Act) made all Native Americans born



in the USA full American citizens. The issue of land allocation was not finally settled until 1934 and Native Americans did not get full voting rights until 1948 as some states claimed they still had loyalty to their tribes rather than the USA, or because they were living on federal land as guardians of the state. Some Native Americans were worried that this would mean having to give up their tribal identities and others found it hard to trust a government that had treated them so badly in the past.



Source 2: President Coolidge outside the White house with some Native American leaders in 1924

Native American children had been sent to boarding schools to help them "assimilate" into American society. To achieve this children from the same tribes were split up. The school curriculum tried to teach them to make jokes about or forget their culture and many were forced to convert to Christianity. The 1928 Meriam Report said the programme to assimilate Native Americans through education had failed because schools were underfunded and understaffed. It also said that Native Americans should be taught useful skills rather than European culture.

CASE STUDY 2: the treatment of black Americans

"Do you enjoy the same rights as the white people do in America, the land of freedom and democracy, or are you treated over there as second class citizens? Can you go into a restaurant where white people dine? Can you get a seat in the theatre where white people sit? Is lynching a lawful activity in a democratic country?"

From a leaflet aimed at black American soldiers. It was dropped into Allied trenches by the Germans during the First World War

The Declaration of Independence in 1776 said that "all men are created equal", although most of the Founding Fathers were slave owners and did not consider black Americans to be covered by this. Victory for the US government in the Civil War in 1865 meant that slavery was abolished but black Americans living in the Southern States that had fought to keep slavery still faced racial discrimination and economic inequality.



This discrimination was formalised by the 'Jim Crow laws' from the 1890s which said that black Americans had to be treated as "separate but equal". This was known as **segregation**. Black and white Americans had to be kept apart, which became a way by which black Americans could be treated badly. Segregation made sure black Americans were poor, badly educated, lived in separate neighbourhoods in poor quality housing, were separated on public transport and in some cases not allowed to vote in the southern states of the USA.



Source 3: a 1904 cartoon highlighting the effects of segregation in public transport

Examples of Jim Crow Laws -

- In 1896 the Supreme Court ruled in the Plessey versus Ferguson case that it was acceptable for black people to be kept "separate but equal" on public transport; this was extended to education in 1899 by the Cumming versus Board of Education ruling.
- In Alabama bus stations had to have separate waiting rooms.
- In Florida there were separate schools for black and white children.
- In North Carolina school textbooks could only be used by the first race to use them.
- In Georgia black and white people could not be buried in the same place.
- In Mississippi marriage between black and white people was illegal.
- 400,000 black troops served in France during the First World War but they were kept in special segregated units known as the 'Jim Crow Army'.

The 14th amendment to the US Constitution had given freedom and citizenship to former slaves and the 15th amendment had given them the right to vote. Many southern states considered black Americans to be inferior so they found ways to avoid enforcing these laws. They prevented black Americans from voting by using:

- a "grandfather" clause if your grandfather could vote, so could you (so grandchildren of slaves could not then vote)
- a poll tax a tax you had to pay to be allowed to vote (poor black people could not afford
 it)
- a literacy test poorly educated black people would not pass and even if black people did pass they could still be told they had failed.

After the slaves were freed they became sharecroppers. This meant that they had to work on other people's farms and pay the landowners a share of the crops they grew. The problem was that this did not make much money. They were very poor and could be thrown off the



land any time. Because families were so poor many black children had to work on the farms as well, which alongside the poor quality and overcrowded schools for black children meant they were not very well educated when they grew up. Booker T. Washington organised schools to help educate black men and women and many of those who went to his schools were adults.

Lynching was a common way for white people to punish black people who argued with them. There were 2,734 lynchings between 1887 and 1915, and 430 lynchings just between 1915 and 1922. It was often treated as public entertainment. Lynching was an illegal and unofficial execution by a mob usually by hanging someone from a tree. It was very difficult to prosecute, although journalists like Ida B. Wells and organisations like the NAACP did everything to publicise the problem.

Southern democrats opposed a law outlawing lynching in the 1920s. The Dyer Bill of 1921 tried to define lynching as the murder of a US citizen by a group of three or more people and that local officials like the sheriff would be held responsible if they did not do everything they could to protect the victim. The County in which lynching occurred would have to pay \$10,000 to the victim's family. Southern senators argued that lynching was necessary to protect white women from being attacked by black men so the bill never became a law.

The federal government did not do anything to solve this problem as they believed it was a matter for individual states to deal with. President Wilson even extended segregation to government offices in Washington in 1916 and had a screening of 'Birth of a Nation' in the White House. Many politicians were also afraid of losing white votes, such as an Indiana Congressman who admitted in 1924 that he was forced to join the Klan or would not get elected. Democrat politicians mostly represented southern states and opposed any federal laws that would affect segregation.

"To join the KKK answer "yes" – are you a native born white American? Do you believe in clannishness, and will you faithfully practice it towards other Klansmen? Do you believe in, and will faithfully maintain, white supremacy?"

From the Kloran, the Klan book of rules

The **Ku Klux Klan** was a secret organisation created in the southern states during the Civil War to intimidate and control black Americans, to maintain white supremacy. It had been outlawed after the Civil War but was re-founded in 1915 by a doctor, William J. Simmons, to combat new threats to white Protestant supremacy posed by Catholic and Jewish immigrants. This revival was inspired by a popular film called "Birth of the Nation" about the Civil War. It showed Klansmen rescuing a town from marauding black troops, a scene that was often greeted with a standing ovation by white audiences.

The Ku Klux Klan got its name from the Greek word 'kuklos' meaning circle. It was organised into local groups called Klaverns. Imperial Wizard Evans was the leader of the Klan hierarchy which included ranks such as Klaliff, Klud, Klabee, Cyclops, Hydra and King Kleagle. Simmons was supported by Edward Young Clarke and Mrs Elizabeth Tyler who were responsible for advertising and selling membership with the distinctive white Klan robes for \$10.

Membership rose sharply and peaked at 5 million members in 1924 and included the governors of Oregon and Oklahoma. The Klan expanded quickly in southern cities like Memphis and Atlanta as black workers moved into cities. There was also rising white resentment against arming black soldiers and using immigrant workers. Evans said economic distress and un-American things like bootleggers, unbelievers, marital infidelity, criminals, corruption, and immigration attracted people to the Klan. As one Imperial Wizard, Hiram Wesley Evans, put it, "It is the way of the world that each race must fight for its life, must conquer or accept slavery or die."



The Klan promoted the superiority of WASPs – white, Anglo-Saxon [from northern Europe], Protestants. They were originally just against black Americans but this now extended to communists, Catholics and Jews as well. As founder William J Simmons explained it, "America is a garbage can! When hordes of aliens walk to the ballot box and their votes outnumber yours, then that alien horde has got you by the throat".

The Klan had a variety of methods to intimidate people – encouraging **boycotts** of unsympathetic businesses, putting burning crosses outside their houses, blowing up the churches and houses of people they wanted to scare, beating up or even killing black people and those who try to help them. This description of some of the Klan's activities comes from 'Current History' written by RA Patton in 1929 "A lad whipped with branches until his back was ribboned flesh; a negress beaten and left helpless to contract pneumonia from exposure and die... a naturalised foreigner flogged until his back was pulp because he married an American woman; a negro lashed until he sold his land to a white man for a fraction of its value".

The Ku Klux Klan was able to get away with these activities in the southern states because many state and law enforcement officials, from governors down to judges and sheriffs, were members. They were so confident in their political strength that on 8th August 1925 50,000 Klan members marched in Washington. When the Attorney General of Maine spoke out against the Klan they had him removed from office. The Klan even ran a very successful hate campaign against the Democrat candidate for President, Alfred E. Smith, in 1927 because he was a Catholic and Republican Herbert Hoover won the election.



Source 4: Klan members marching through Washington DC in 1928

Support for the Klan declined rapidly towards the end of the 1920s. By 1929 there were less than a million members. Immigration acts had reduced the threat from foreign workers and a number of high profile scandals made the Klan seem less than perfect. The most famous example involved the Grand Dragon of Indiana, DC Stephenson. He tried to use his Klan influence to avoid being convicted for the rape and brutal murder of his assistant.



"We believe that black people should have a country of their own where they should be given the fullest possible opportunity to develop politically, socially and industrially."

Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, writing in 'The Negro's Greatest Enemy' in 1923

Many black Americans responded to the difficulties by migrating to the cities of the north. Between 1915 and 1925 1.5 million black Americans moved north. The black American population of Chicago rose from 44,000 in 1910 to 234,000 in 1930. In the same period the black American population of New York increased from 91,000 to 328,000. They lived in poor quality overcrowded housing in ghettoes like South Side in Chicago and Harlem in New York. In Harlem black Americans were living 335 to an acre by the 1920s.

It is easy to see why black Americans wanted to move north. As a newspaper produced for black Americans in 1921 said "Look around at your cabin, look at the dirt floor and windows without glass. Then ask your folks already up North about the bathrooms with hot and cold water. What chance has the average black man to get these back home? And if he does get them, how can he be sure that some night some poor white man won't get his gang together and come round and drive him out?" There were a number of other reasons for this migration:

- Some were trying to escape discrimination, intimidation and poverty.
- Some were leaving behind the damage done to their farms by the boll weevil infestation
 of farms in the South in 1914 as well as frequent flooding that was making cotton farming
 very difficult.
- Some were travelling North to take jobs in factories that needed more workers to meet increased demand because of the First World War.

There was widespread rioting against the growing black communities in the northern towns and cities. White workers thought that black workers were driving down wages and causing housing shortages. One of the most serious was the Chicago race riot of 1919. A black teenager on Lake Michigan got too close to the whites only beach and was stoned until he sank under water. The riots lasted 5 days and had to be broken up by the army. In the end 23 black Americans and 15 white Americans were killed and 537 people were wounded.

Life in the North was better in some ways. There was more work and higher wages. New churches were quickly built and became a focus for the black community. The towns and cities of the north enabled black Americans to own their own businesses, newspapers, banks and houses.

As black Americans moved north they brought jazz music with them and introduced it to young white Americans. Venues like the Cotton Club in Harlem became the centre of the jazz movement showcasing band leaders like Duke Ellington and musicians like Louis Armstrong. There was some irony in the demand for black performers in northern cities as black Americans were banned from being in the audience. The 'Harlem Renaissance', as it became known, saw many black American writers like Langston Hughes, artists such as Augusta Savage, as well as musicians, comedians and actors, move to the black district of Harlem in New York to write or make works of art about the suffering of black people in America.





Source 5: Black American troops in France in 1919

During the First World War segregated units were only usually allowed to do menial tasks. Those who did get to fight were given medals, but only by the French. This experience increased the awareness of the need for equality. As one black veteran said, "I'm glad I went. I done my part and I'm going to fight right here until Uncle Sam does his". There were several organisations that began to campaign to improve civil rights for black Americans:

- W.E.B. Dubois founded the **NAACP** (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in 1909. This organisation tried to help black people to overcome segregation laws where-ever possible, without actually breaking the law. They produced information leaflets to show how black people were being treated so badly and went on marches to publicise their cause. They sent lawyers to help defend black and white people who had broken the segregation laws. In 1915 they organized boycotts of the pro-Klan film 'Birth of a Nation'. The NAACP's first court success was in the 1915 Guinn versus USA case when Oklahoma's grandfather clause was declared unconstitutional, followed by the 1917 Buchanan versus Warley case when segregation in housing policies were declared unconstitutional. Dubois also published the NAACP journal "The Crisis" to highlight discrimination and black achievements. The NAACP had 91,000 members by 1919.
- Marcus Garvey founded **UNIA** (the Universal Negro Improvement Association) in 1914 to help send black people back to Africa, the land of their ancestors: "Every American Negro and every West Indian Negro must understand that there is but one fatherland for the Negro, and that is Africa" (Marcus Garvey in 1919). UNIA encouraged black people to set up their own businesses which led to the beginnings of a black middle class, both in the professions like law or medicine and in business. It also started its own shipping line, the Black Star Line, to transport people and goods to Africa. UNIA had 2 million members by 1920, but in 1923 Garvey was convicted of mail fraud and deported as an 'undesirable alien' in 1927.

The two organisations did not get along very well, despite the aim of both being able to improve the lives of black Americans. UNIA accused the NAACP of being ashamed of black Americans' ancestry and of giving into white Americans while the NAACP criticised UNIA for concentrating on race and separatism.



RECOMMENDED VIEWING – Key Question 2

Monkey Trial documentary https://youtu.be/IVD4Tjxn]0M or/ and court rooms scenes from the 1950s reconstruction of the trial in 'Inherit the Wind' https://youtu.be/MPfhOhx3x_w and the argument between creationism and evolution resolved in a silent film of a train crash (!) https://youtu.be/MPfhOhx3x_w and the simpsons https://youtu.be/-5WNULhDVOY

GENERAL 1920s AMERICA SUPPORTING VIDEO MATERIAL:

Crash Course History - Roaring 20s https://youtu.be/VfOR1XCMf7A

BBC 20th Century Boom and Bust https://youtu.be/4Xrz69_W4ew

BBC American Voices: clips on Timelines TV

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvsS9mRi0sXb78FqO8DACiXgoF-sih5K-

BBC American Voices: full episodes

- 1. Immigration https://youtu.be/txB7_9E1E8Q
- 2. Boom and Bust https://youtu.be/iwy5HNuHNes
- 3. Hard Times https://youtu.be/OenNGPd6n-I
- 4. New Deal https://youtu.be/Re-XsLwylCo
- 5. Black America https://youtu.be/4wiOs5T9go

The Century: America's Time -

- 1. The Beginning: Seeds of Change https://youtu.be/dssfiPirT2U
- 2. 1914-1919: Shell Shock https://youtu.be/1GBWDQ5cFU
- 3. 1920-1929: Boom To Bust https://youtu.be/RN7ftyZigYs



GLOSSARY:

| Bible Belt | Part of rural America in the south east, where very strict Christians lived. |
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| Revivalists | Wanted to increase Church attendance. |
| Fundamentalists | Believed that the Bible, in particular the Old Testament, was literally true. |
| Theory of Evolution | Said that life was shaped by a process of natural selection. |
| Creationists | Believed the theory that Man evolved from apes was an attack on religious beliefs. |
| Monkey Trial | A public argument about whether or not humans were descended from apes. |
| Segregation | Black and white Americans had to be kept apart in public places. |
| Lynching | Illegally killing black Americans by a white mob. |
| Ku Klux Klan | Ku Klux Klan was a secret organisation created in the southern states during the Civil War to intimidate and control black Americans, to maintain white supremacy. |
| Boycotts | Refusing to use a business so that it loses money. |
| NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) | Tried to help black people to overcome segregation laws where-ever possible, without actually breaking the law. |
| UNIA (the Universal Negro Improvement Association) | Encouraged black Americans to have pride in their African heritage, helped send black people back to Africa. |



REFERENCES:

FRONT COVER: Klan members burn a cross in 1921 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ku_Klux_Klux_Klan Klan#/media/File:Ku Klux Klan members and a burning cross, Denver, Colorado, 1921.jpg)

"Source 1 : Biology teacher John T Scopes in 1924 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_T._Scopes#/media/File:John_t_scopes.jpg

"Source 2: Native Americans meeting President Coolidge at the White House in 1924 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Citizenship_Act#/media/File:IndianAct2.jpg

Source 3: John T McCutcheon cartoon illustrating segregation in public transport in 1904 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Crow_laws#/media/File:JimCrowCar2.jpg

*Source 4: Klan members marching in Washington DC 1928 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ku_Klux_Klan_members_march_down_Pennsylvania_Avenue_in_Washington, D.C. in 1928.jpg

viSource 5: Black American troops in 1919 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racial_segregation_in_the_United_States_Armed_Forces#/media/File:How_they_did_it_over_there. (African_American) troops of the 505th Engineers that returned on S.S. . . . - NARA - 533525.tif