



In Search of the American  
Dream 1917-1996:  
A thematic study

Meadowhead History Department

Y11-12 Transition Work

Name.....

## Background

**Task 1: Read through the following information about the USA before 1900 and highlight the key points.**

### The USA pre 1900

The History of the USA is relatively recent. Following their independence from Great Britain in 1783, Americans began to settle into their new continent with amazing speed. By the mid nineteenth century they had gained all land south of Canada and north of Mexico between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This was achieved mainly through purchase and warfare.

The land mass was 3,022,000 square miles, in contrast with 94,525 square miles of the UK. It was settled so quickly that by 1890 the Census declared there was no longer any underdeveloped territory available for settlement.

The entire history of the USA until 1920 had happened in a space of 140 years. There was little time for development of tradition as there had been in Europe. The individual was thought to be of vast importance and the continent of America was there to be settled quickly. The fact that it was settled so quickly and the country developed so rapidly led many people to believe in the 'American Dream'; that with hard work and initiative one could achieve anything without expecting much support from the government.

The USA was a land rich in natural resources, fertile for crops and populated by an energetic, dynamic people who were mainly descended from immigrants. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century had seen the biggest migration in history with millions leaving the old world of Europe and Asia and headed to America to find work, land and freedom from persecution. The USA was originally made up of immigrants who had arrived not willingly but often forcibly as enslaved people from Africa. The Civil war had torn the union apart in the years 1861-5. It had ended slavery but not the persecution of African Americans. The North had grown increasingly wealthy from industrial development, while the South had remained predominantly rural. The West was populated in mythology by pioneers who had tamed a wilderness largely by their own efforts. It had developed as a region of fierce independence with little toleration of government interference.

The USA had an economic structure in which people were free to make money with very little government interference. Industries grew wealthy because of three main factors:

- The relative abundance and cheapness of natural resources
- The availability of cheap, often immigrant labour
- The overwhelming demand in a continent developing so quickly.

Huge industrial concerns grew up in the great cities; but small scale industry also thrived.

**Complete the following three tasks using the information you have read on the USA pre 1900.**

**Task 2a** - True or false – Is the following information true or false? If false please correct it.

Information	True/False
America gained independence from Britain in 1873	
America was able to gain empire quickly	
America was bigger the Great Britain	
By 1890 there was no land available for settlement	
American people did not expect or want government intervention	
The American dream was about hard work and initiative	
America was mainly made of immigrants	
The Civil War lasted from 1860-64	
The Civil War ended slavery in America and persecution of blacks	
Taxes were kept low to encourage industry	

**Task 2b** - Define the following key words from the text.

Word	Meaning
Census	
Government intervention	
American Dream	
Civil War	
Slavery	
Immigrant	
Industrial	
Rural	
Persecution	

**Task three** - Your teacher has written an essay describing America pre 1900. However they have made some mistakes. Read through, find the errors and correct them.

America is a relatively new country. They had been part of the British Empire and used for transportation but in 1783 they gained independence. By the 1850s they had taken over all of Canada and Mexico by buying them and through war. America soon became an attractive country with many people wanting to move there; the census of 1790 stated that there was no more room for settlement and immigration was decreased. Even so lots of people still wanted to move there because of the American Dream – the idea that if you worked hard and took matters into your own hands the government would support you and would give you advice. The government also believed in low taxes for business owners. Another reason to move to America in the 1900s was because of

the end of the Civil War, The majority of Americans were pleased that in 1865 slavery was abolished and that America was now not a racist country. A good example of this was that the KKK died down. There were three reasons for American economic prosperity. Firstly the fact the America had few natural resources meant that initiative was needed to create good and there were lots of opportunities. Secondly the amount of immigrants led to cheap labour and lastly the demand for goods.

**Correct the mistakes your History teacher has made in this essay.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

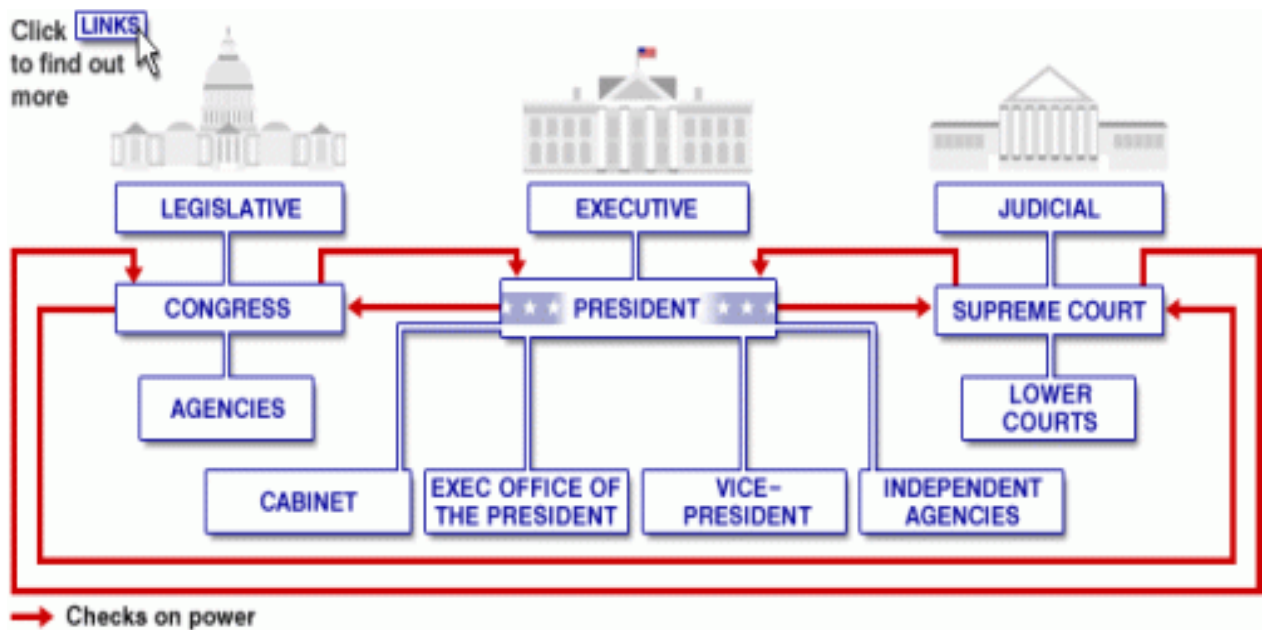
## The Political System of the USA.

The government of the USA is split into three sections.

1. Legislature – The group of people that make the laws and change existing laws
2. Executive - The branch in charge of enforcing the laws
3. Supreme Court - Responsible for interpreting the laws and deciding if they are fair

**Task 3:** Go to the following website address and use the diagram on the BBC website. Click on the links for each section to find out about their role and use the information to answer the questions below.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/americas/04/us\\_election/govt\\_system/html/introduction.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/americas/04/us_election/govt_system/html/introduction.stm)



1. Which sections of the US government come under the control of the legislative branch?

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2. What are the responsibilities of the Legislative branch?

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3. In addition to leading the Executive branch of government what other responsibilities does the President have?

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4. What is the role of the Cabinet and how many members are there?

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5. How many different sections does the President have direct control over and what is their role?

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6. Give two examples of independent agencies and explain what their roles are.

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7. What is the Supreme Court? How is it organised?

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8. Why are there lower courts as well as the Supreme Court?

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## Key Words: USA

**Task 4:** Find definitions for the following key words from the American Dream course.

Key term	Definition
President	
Capitalism	
Communism	
Congress	
Constitution	
Democrat	
Republican	
House of Representatives	
Judiciary	
Federalism	
Left Wing	
Right wing	
Socialism	
Supreme Court	
Trade Unions	
Isolationism	
Veto	

