

During the period, 1945-1989, what was the impact of one or more of the following on American society: racial conflict; urban poverty; drugs and crime.

Racial conflict was a constant feature of American society in the 20th century. Segregationist laws (Jim Crow) were widespread across the USA, especially in many southern states in America. Born out of post WWI liberalism, modern Civil Rights activism grew enormously in the 1950s and 1960s which led to sweeping positive changes, **and conflict with those opposed to it.** A new optimism emerged at the end of World War 2 with black soldiers returning home after not prepared to face discrimination at home after fighting for American freedom abroad. The segregation of armed forces came to an end in 1948 with an Executive Order issued by Truman which stated: 'there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, colour, religion, or national origin'. This was soon followed by changes in Educational law. The Supreme Court ruled on the landmark case *Board v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, unanimously agreed that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. The decision overturned the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson ruling that sanctioned "separate but equal" segregation of races, ruling that separate educational facilities were inherently unequal. This was a crucial legal turning point which paved the way for large-scale desegregation

Under the leadership of Martin Luther King, The Montgomery Bus Boycott succeeded in desegregating city buses. Against Violence and intimidation from the KKK and white police, the Boycott won out when the Supreme Court ruled that segregation on city buses was unconstitutional. This was achieved by collective action by the black community and done in a peaceful, non-violent way. Success in this Boycott paved the way for more equality with the Sit-ins and freedom rides. **This profoundly impacted on black American society.** Restaurants, Inter-city buses were among several public facilities desegregated, meaning Blacks and Whites had equality of access. King would go on to become the un-elected leader of the Civil Rights Campaign motivating the masses with his powerful oratory, most notably in Washington DC in 1963, where he delivered his historic 'I Have a Dream' speech.

Racial conflict did bring about positive change for millions of Americans as the US government was forced into introducing sweeping civil rights legislation. In 1964, President Lyndon B Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law. This Act prohibited discrimination of all kinds based on race, colour, religion, or national origin. The law also provides the federal government with the powers to enforce desegregation. A year later, in Selma Martin Luther King led a march from Selma to Montgomery. The police attacked the crowd with tear gas and batons, and these images were beamed across America to the shock and horror of millions. The March, and the conflict with Alabama police which was reported on by the national media, was a catalyst for pushing through the Voting Rights Act the same year. In August of 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, removing all barriers preventing Southern blacks to register to vote. Literacy tests, poll taxes, and other such requirements that were used to restrict black voting are made illegal. These were historic pieces of legislation which impacted on US society by giving all of its citizens equal voting rights.

After WW2, the movement of blacks from the rural south to the urban north increased. Technological advances in farming deprived thousands of blacks of jobs and were forced to seek employment in manufacturing industries in the cities. However, as the US economy stagnated in the

late 60s and early 70s, jobs in manufacturing declined and many had to resort to low-paid jobs or welfare. Housing was inadequate as many of the poor were forced into run-down and crowded high-rise apartment blocks. As the influx of migrants and immigrants grew ever bigger, many middle-class whites moved to the suburbs. Business followed them, creating a significant loss of tax revenue in city centre areas which severely burdened city councils. Segregation once again became an issue as black people were trapped in one area of housing. This meant that education was, in practice, also segregated. Most black schools in US cities were under-funded. Pupils became caught in a poverty cycle, leaving school with little or no formal education and thus ill-equipped to compete in the job market.

This urban poverty had a negative impact on US society. As the economic climate became harsher in the 1970s, the income gap between black and white people began to widen. The US suffered a recession in the early 70s due to the Oil crisis and by 1975 25 million Americans were in receipt of benefit. As inflation rose in the 1980s, President Reagan scaled back welfare payments which forced more people into poverty and affected black people the most. The number of Homeless in New York alone hit 23,000 at its peak in the 1980s. Urban poverty was still a very real problem by the time Reagan left office in 1989.

Crime rates and drug-related crimes rose rapidly in the 70s and 80s and very much mirrored the social problems in inner city ghettos. The rise in crime was due to a number of factors. Widespread unemployment and the growing poverty cycle led many black youths to commit crimes. Lenient US gun laws and easy gun acquisition helped to facilitate robberies and hold-ups. **Drug addiction had a destructive impact** on US society. Cheap 'crack cocaine' was prevalent in ghettos. To feed their habit, Drug users would frequently resort to theft. Drug trafficking became big business and often operated by organised crime. Cocaine and other illegal substances were shipped in from South America and were dispensed by ethnic gangs in big American cities. **Drugs addiction impacted on urban society in a terrifying way** as it helped spread the deadly AIDS virus by using dirty needles. Drug addiction declined in the late 80s but drugs remained a serious social problem in inner-city areas.

Thus, the picture by 1989 was very mixed. In post WW2 US, Many blacks benefited from the improved social and economic trends. More blacks attended university and an educated black leadership emerged in the US. Increased living standards for blacks also led to rising expectations and a demand for equal treatment with whites. Clearly, great strides had been made, not least through laws to extend legal and civil rights. Voting was now unimpeded(**SUMMARY-USING ORIGINAL LANGUAGE**) which led to an increase in the number of Black, Hispanic and woman Governors, Supreme Court Judges and Senators. Affirmative Action(**NEW INFORMATION**) gave job preference to ethnic minorities in Government jobs which helped to create an improved racial balance in the workplace. However, for many minorities, the gap between rich and poor remained as vast as ever. Racial tension and urban poverty were still visible features of American society in the US, as seen in the 1992 LA riots(**LOOKING BEYOND DATE**)