

**Paper 2 A4: The USA, 1917-29**

This question is all about the position of Black Americans in the 1920s. Study Sources A, B, C and D and then answer all the questions that follow.

**Source A: a march in Washington, DC, in 1925**



**Source B: Ida Wells (1862-1931), an African American journalist, writing in 1925**

In the ten years succeeded the Civil War thousands of Negroes were murdered for voting. As a consequence no Negroes vote throughout the entire South. The laws of the Southern states make it a crime for whites and Negroes to inter-marry or even ride in the same railway carriage. Both crimes are punishable by fine and imprisonment. The doors of churches, hotels, concert halls and reading rooms are alike closed against the Negro as a man, but every place is open to him as a servant.

**Source C: From a book by James Wheldon Thompson, *Black Manhattan*, written in 1929**

More than two hundred thousand Negroes live in New York, nearly a hundred thousand more than live in any Southern city, and do so without race friction.

They have achieved political independence and without fear vote for whoever they want. The Negro in New York still meets with discriminations and disadvantages. But New York guarantees her Negro citizens the fundamental rights of citizenship and protects them in the exercise of those rights. Possessing the basic rights, the Negro in New York ought to be able to work through the discriminations and disadvantages.

**Source D: From a history textbook, written in 2009**

The position of black people in the south was intolerable: the Ku Klux Klan, reaching a peak in 1925 when it had over 5 million members, saw blacks facing vicious intimidation and even lynchings. Most lived in chronic poverty, while the segregation saw blacks face discrimination in every sphere of life. The early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw thousands go north in what is known as the Great Migration. Many many blacks found poverty, discrimination and violence in the north too, but they also had greater rights and economic opportunities, and a flourishing black culture too.

**Study Source A**

- (a) What can you learn from source A about the role of the Ku Klux Klan in America in the 1920s (3)

The source suggests that the KKK were an extreme nationalist group that had a significant amount of popularity within America at the time the photograph was taken. The nationalism is suggested by the flags and the extremism is suggested by the hoods covering the faces. The popularity of the group is suggested by the sheer numbers involved in the march itself which stretches from the Lincoln Memorial to Congress, as well as by the crowds that have appeared to watch.

**Study Sources B and C.**

- (b) How far does Source C support the evidence of Source B about the position of black people in America in the 1920s (7)

On the one hand Source C supports the evidence of Source B in so far as Source B is specifically concerned about the South and Source C is talking about the North. Source C suggests that the North is different from the South by the phrase 'nearly a hundred thousand more than any Southern city and without race friction'. Moreover, it draws the contrast with the South in so far as New York guarantees its blacks 'fundamental rights of citizenship' and protects them in the exercise of those rights. All of this suggests that life in the south is very different, as source B suggests. Moreover source C acknowledges that even in the north there are 'discrimination and disadvantages' so that the segregations listed in source B in 'churches, hotels, concert halls and reading rooms' would appear to be duplicated in the North despite the advantages which life in New York might appear to have. The word 'disadvantage' in source C also agrees with the idea in source B that everywhere the black is 'accepted as a servant'.

On the other hand, source C challenges source B in so far as it suggests that the life of blacks is not as constrained or as restricted as suggested in source B. Black people do have the opportunity to vote and do enjoy the protection of the state of New York, as source C suggests. Source B, by contrast, suggests that at no point is the negro treated as a 'man' but only as a 'servant' whereas source C strongly suggests that Blacks do get to exercise their rights as citizens, and by inference, as men.

Overall, source C supports source B in highlighting the discrimination and disadvantages meted out to black people in America. Although they are referring to two different parts of America (north and south respectively), overwhelmingly they agree that blacks suffer discrimination and disadvantage, even if source C is making the point that the situation is better in the North.

**Study Sources A, B, C and D and use your own knowledge.**

- (c) "In the 1920s, the main reason for the problems of Black Americans was the rise of the Ku Klux Klan."

Use the sources and your own knowledge to explain whether you agree with this view.

**(15)**

On the one hand, there is evidence from the sources and elsewhere that the main reason for the problems of black Americans in the 1920s was the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. Source A indicates the popularity and influence of the organisation in America during this period, whilst source B notes that African-Americans were murdered just for attempting to vote. Source B refers specifically to a campaign of terror in the years immediately following the Civil War, but the Ku Klux Klan was re-founded following the film by D. W. Griffiths, 'Birth of a Nation' in which Klansmen were celebrated as upholders of American values, and according to source D reached a peak in 1925 when it reached 5 million members. Klansmen contributed to black discrimination not only by carrying out lynching, but by intimidation of white juries and lawmen to turn a blind eye to their acts of terror.

On the other hand, sources B, C and D make it clear that black problems were not limited to the Ku Klux Klan. In particular, source B outlines the importance of southern laws, which were known as the Jim Crow laws, which enforced segregation and outlawed inter-marriage. Source C makes it clear that despite the absence of such laws in the north, African-Americans continued to experience

'discrimination and disadvantage' following the Great Migration to northern cities. In the absence of de jure discrimination, therefore, African Americans continued to experience de facto discrimination. Moreover, source D makes the point that Negroes experienced violence in northern cities, in which Klansmen would have been less prevalent, so that even acts of intimidation were not limited to Klansmen. The activist WEB du Bois argued for negro civil rights and founded a pressure group, the NAACP, for this purpose, indicating that Black problems were legal and political, and not merely about random and sporadic acts of violence. In addition, source D highlights the economic problems faced by black people, who were paid less and were the last to be hired and first to be fired. The activist Marcus Garvey was particularly focussed on black economic problems, and founded the UNIA with those problems in mind.

Overall, it seems clear that the Ku Klux Klan represented a significant but not necessarily the most significant aspect of black experience in America. Black problems ranged far beyond the rural south where the Ku Klux Klan was strongest, and ranged into legal segregation and economic problems which were outside of the control of the Klan. Klan intimidation represented the tip of the iceberg, but underneath lay systems of discrimination both economic and legal.