**5 In the light of differing interpretations, how convincing do you find the view that the**

**Reagan presidency was a time of ‘deterioration and decline’ (*Extract 1, lines 7–8*) in the advancement of black Americans in the USA?**

**To explain your answer, analyse and evaluate the material in both extracts, using your own knowledge of the issues. (20 marks)**

**Extract 1:** From Stephen Tuck, *African American Protest during the Reagan Years: Forging New Agendas, Defending Old Victories*, published 2008.

For the traditional civil rights leadership, the rise of Reagan spelled trouble.

A director of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People

(NAACP) complained, ‘The age of the volunteer has come to an end.’ By the end

of the 1980s, NAACP membership had plummeted from half a million to barely

a hundred thousand; support for nonviolent, progressive students had been

replaced by majority condemnation of violent, idle young black men. Histories

of the civil rights movement describe the Reagan years as years of deterioration

and decline.

The downturn in fortune experienced by many African Americans during

these years seems to confirm the gloomy picture. The inequality gap in wages

and employment held steady through to the mid-1990s, and in some aspects

the gap widened. Inner city poverty, family breakdown, and gang violence

were seemingly entrenched. The arrival of crack cocaine in the mid-1980s

compounded the problem. New get-tough crime measures led to an astonishing

rise in the numbers of young black men in prison. During the 1980s, sociologists

popularized the term ‘underclass’ – a group with no prospect of breaking out

of poverty. Little wonder then, that many polls showed increasing pessimism

among African Americans that racial equality would be achieved within a lifetime

**Extract 2:** From Gil Troy, *The Reagan Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*, published 2009.

The civil rights revolution continued [under Reagan]. Racism was no longer

acceptable in public or in polite company. Polls showed that 98 per cent of

whites did not object to blacks moving in next door, 95 per cent accepted

bosses who were black, 89 per cent would go to a black doctor, and 85 per cent

approved of their children hosting black playmates. Even if whites exaggerated

their openness, these dramatic attitude shifts created a new, more open-minded,

more civil culture.

African Americans streamed into America’s middle class, joining important

institutions essential to their eventual success. The number of black

undergraduates grew to more than 2 million in 1988. Four hundred thousand

blacks served in perhaps America’s most color-blind institution, the military,

constituting 20 per cent of the overall force. Blacks were moving into previously

segregated neighborhoods, and enrolling in formerly lily-white elite schools.

They also made their mark not only as doctors, lawyers and corporate executives

in previously closed professions, but also as police officers, fire fighters, and

electricians. African Americans became healthier too. Their life expectancy

increased to 69.7 years in 1987 and the infant mortality rate dropped.