
A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042 / 1K The Making of a Superpower: USA, 1865-1975
Report on the Examination

7042
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General Comments

The paper proved accessible with very few students not answering the number of questions required.. In addition, there were very few responses cut short because of poor time management or because they had run out of material. As in previous years, it was clear that almost all students were keen to do well and had prepared material reasonably well. As detailed below however, some knowledge was generic and it was in the deployment of specific material keenly focused on the set question that a number of students stumbled. Most commonly amongst the less prepared there was quite some resort to sweeping statements that might have been applicable to almost any decade covered by the course. In addition, appropriate coverage of the full period set by the question caused problems for some students that focused on one or two events to the detriment of the broader themes.

Question 01

Most students elected to examine each extract in turn and to begin by identifying the main argument or theme. This is an entirely valid approach and, when combined with a clear statement about how convincing the view was, tended to prove effective.

Unfortunately some students moved some way from the focus of American society in the 1920s and 1930s set in the question and went in to detail about the 1940s and even '50s, especially with regard to race relations. Better responses had a very keen and focused approach giving specific examples that related to the period given. In addition, information that was given was keenly focused on evaluation rather than on simply adding contextual detail to points raised in the extract. Unfortunately a number of students simply copied out information from the extract and did not engage with the arguments or points of view given. The purpose of the exercise is for students to evaluate argument and opinion and so, for example, simply adding detail to comments in Extract B about the number of immigrants to the USA did not really engage with the view given that this 'led to turbulent times'. It is in the evaluation of opinion that the higher levels are accessed.

Extract A offered many views that might have been identified by students, although the most common was that Americans ate better and lived longer. Again, there was a good deal of information used to challenge or to corroborate this view, but some belonged outside of the period, for example reference to McDonalds. Many chose to challenge the view that the Depression and the New Deal created positive changes but did struggle to find any knowledge that provided balance that perhaps there were at least some positive outcomes. The sense that the 1930s brought new opportunities for some was summarily dismissed by too many.

Extract B offered balance to the positive view and there was some very effective knowledge deployed regarding the revival of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. This was effectively challenged by a large number that were able to reference the trial of Stephenson. This was perhaps the most common balance offered by students on this extract, although more nuanced knowledge about the prevalence of segregation and discrimination in different areas of the USA was largely lacking with a tendency to view the whole of the USA as one. Given the nature of the course it was surprising that there was not a greater awareness of the differences apparent across the USA. The last sentence of the extract was evaluated very effectively by some with a keen focus on what constituted a movement, although many simply referenced Flappers as evidence with little developed engagement with class and social distinction, and least of all the idea of there being a movement.

Extract C again had a large number of views which students might have engaged with, although the opening notion of a society transformed was much less effectively dealt with. It was relatively

common for students to identify specific phrases such as that there was a spread of Hollywood movies for example, and very commonly there was a pleasing use of specific knowledge to illustrate this, however there was much less engagement with the actual argument that this 'created a celebrity-obsessed nation'. More practice in identifying argument in extracts would have benefitted a number of students on this question.

Question 02

This was a very popular question and it was hoped it would have proven accessible to all. Indeed, many students were able to offer good specific knowledge and had obviously prepared material related to the extent of progress for former slaves in the USA. A number of students were confident in their exposition and had a clear judgment from the outset of their response. This was balanced however by students that offered excessively descriptive pieces, perhaps detailing the nature of the Freedmen's Bureau or giving detailed information about notable individuals such as Johnson but without explaining if there was notable progress as a result. In addition, whilst there was sound general knowledge about the experience of former slaves, there was notable confusion over specific details. For example, many students had plainly heard of the grandfather clause, but were unable to accurately detail what it actually did and its impact, with really quite confused understanding about the nature of voter registration and qualification in different states. Some students did struggle with knowledge and resorted to comparing events during the period set with events in the 1950s and 1960s which perhaps they had a greater understanding of. Careful reading of the question would have also helped some students to focus their response on America's southern states. These comments should however be qualified by the fact that, where students knew specific material, there were some very impressive answers indeed.

Question 03

This was the least popular question, and those that chose to answer it did tend to have good specific knowledge in support. In fact, there was some very impressive, detailed, material offered on both Wilson and also Roosevelt with most able to detail attitudes to big business and worker relations, although there was relatively little reference to tariff reform. The better prepared were able to comment very convincingly on contrasting attitudes to the role of federal government and also reference to broader themes of social reform. Some responses attempted to focus almost solely on attitudes to national parks and the environment and became rather generalised as a result. Unfortunately, there were a number of very informed students that struggled to really contrast and compare policies, making excessive comment on personality or reason for success in elections. There was often some quite detailed description of the 1912 election but much less focus on policy differences. Students that decided to structure their responses by considering the policies of each president in turn, with only a brief comparison in a tentative conclusion, failed to engage with the question itself and were often limited to Level 2 description as a result.

Question 04

This was a popular question and was handled well by those that had specific knowledge. Unfortunately it was clear that some students did not have much to offer on the period itself and resorted to very general description of the nature of the US economy which might have applied to any period. In addition, a very detailed description of the wartime economy was frequently given which, whilst accurate, was not then explicitly linked to reasons for a post-war boom. Knowledge

about the rise of a consumer society was generally good, although the better responses were confidently able to extend beyond general comment about new products or easy credit to offer something a little more specific. The rise of the suburb and of Levittown was commonly mentioned as was the baby boom with some good specific detail on how this linked to a growth in the US economy. The expansion of freeways under Eisenhower was also a popular theme with many able to explain how this promoted the economy further. Some students were able to identify specific car companies, although here there was confusion over the role of Ford and there was much commentary that was more appropriate for the 1920s. The development of the Cold War was a popular theme, as was the Korean War, but there was much less effective explanation of how this might have led to economic growth. The actual comparison between different factors was often weak and consequently a comparative judgment was relatively rare.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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