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# A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/2Q The American Dream Reality or Illusion  
Report on the Examination June 2022

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7042  
June 2022

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## General

The exam differentiated well with a wide range of marks across each question. Due to the unique circumstances of the past year, students were provided with Advance Information to assist their preparation. For most, this helped them produce detailed and well thought out responses, but for some it narrowed their responses and discouraged them from engaging with the questions' key terms. The most challenging aspect of the A-Level remains the source questions. Students are now well versed in deploying well-structured responses, focusing on content, context and provenance. Some students still need to focus more on the core value of the source for the issue in question and avoid being overly dismissive due to individual details such as date of publication or the author. For the essay questions, the most successful students continue to be those who engaged closely with the wording of the question, brought in a wide range of precise, accurate material and thought clearly about the line of argument to pursue and sustain. Compared to previous summer series, it was encouraging to see that the majority of students were balancing their time more appropriately between the source question and the two essay responses. Despite this, there were still some examples of excessively long responses to question 01 (despite it only being worth five more marks) with undeveloped essay responses as a result.

## Question 01

This question was designed to explore both section five and section six of Part Two of the specification: challenges to the American Dream, 1963-1980. The majority of students recognised the focus of the question was on the candidates in and reasons for the outcome of, the 1976 election, though some students sought to bring in material from the presidency of Jimmy Carter which was not directly relevant to this question. Generally, the structure of most responses was logical and clearly examined different areas of the sources and their value by assessing content, context and provenance. The vast majority of responses addressed each source in turn, commenting on its key features and providing a judgement on its value for the issue in question. There is still an issue with students looking at the sources in a binary way 'it is valuable because/it is not valuable because'. The stronger responses were able to consider the wider value of each source taking into consideration any potential limitations as part of their evaluation. A minority of responses tried to address the sources collectively in a thematic manner. This is best avoided, as it meant that large sections of each source were not commented upon, meaning there was a clear imbalance in the degree of breadth and depth of comment offered.

Generally, the students understood and engaged well with the three sources. This was especially the case with Source A, as many recognised its value as an example of Carter's campaigning strategy, the use of media and the underlying issues of trust in politicians. For source B, there was strong contextual knowledge present in many responses, particularly of the Watergate Affair and subsequent pardoning of Richard Nixon by Gerald Ford. Comments on provenance tended to be weaker, however, based on general statements such as bias and therefore dismissing its value. This was especially the case for source C. Some students were overly dismissive of it due to the description of its Democrat supporting nature, without applying this to its content and context which highlighted its slightly hesitant support for the incoming president given the challenges he faced.

Source questions remain a challenge for students, but it is encouraging to see that centres are using a wide range of effective strategies to encourage good practice and deeper engagement with the sources.

### Question 02

This was the most popular question and offered students a broad range of issues to write on. Responses could include material from all three bullet points in the section of the Advance Information 'Truman and Post-war America, 1945-1952'. It was evident in the responses to this question that many students had prepared thoroughly using the Advance Information. Top performing students were able to offer specific details of a range of economic, social and political issues in the period. These included rising prosperity among workers, the emerging civil rights movement, the move from a war to peacetime economy, McCarthyism and Truman's conflicts with the 'do-nothing' Congress. Students were able to demonstrate good knowledge of these themes. The best students were also able to differentiate between the experiences of different groups in the period, indicating the extent of division or unity they faced. Weaker responses tended to cover a narrower range of issues, be less precise in supporting material or offer a more generalised 'success/failure of Truman's policies' type response. Some students also focused excessively on African Americans and more general commentary about regional differences in relation to segregation. The question produced a wide range of responses, but also some of the best quality answers from the paper.

### Question 03

This was the least popular of the three essay questions and the lowest performing one. Despite the first bullet point for the John F Kennedy section including 'the policies and personalities of the Kennedy administration', some students were evidently not well prepared on the key figures of Kennedy's government. There was a general understanding of key figures such as Robert McNamara, Lyndon Johnson and Bobby Kennedy, but often this was not developed far beyond their basic role in government. Stronger answers did make reference to a range of relevant appointments and were able to explain their successes/failures in some detail. This was especially the case for McNamara and Bobby Kennedy, with occasional mention made of Sargeant Shriver. Some students were generally aware of why Kennedy's appointments were important ('the best and the brightest') but were not able to draw upon specifics. Students tended to focus on Kennedy's policies rather than appointments, meaning they struggled to demonstrate appropriate understanding of the demands of the question for level four and above. Weaker students focused heavily on Kennedy's foreign policy, especially around Cuba. Better responses took into consideration both his domestic and foreign policies. The best answers were able to draw clear links between policy successes/failures to his appointments. This was seen clearly through Bobby Kennedy's role in promoting the civil rights movement in events such as the Freedom Rides.

### Question 04

This was the second most popular of the essay questions, producing another wide range of responses. It focused mainly on the second bullet point from 'The Johnson Presidency, 1963-1968', but students were also able to draw upon relevant material from the first and third bullet points. The multi-faceted nature of the question caught out a minority of students, but most were able to consider a range of relevant military mistakes and draw upon knowledge of other contributing factors such as Johnson's policies, the Vietcong and domestic opposition. Knowledge of the Vietnam conflict itself was strong, with most students well aware of the challenges faced by US soldiers such as their inexperience, guerrilla warfare and ineffective strategies such as

Operation Rolling Thunder. Weaker students tended to lapse into a description of the conflict itself, often beginning from the Gulf of Tonkin incident and ending at the Tet Offensive. Stronger responses were able to draw clear links between how the factors interplayed, such as the brutality of US military methods increasing apathy from the South Vietnamese peasantry and encouraging support for the Vietcong. While the Kennedy legacy was a relevant point to consider for this response, some students over-played this and ended up considering material that was not directly relevant for the time period in question. Domestic opposition was generally dealt with effectively as it was often placed in the context of the failure of US military forces.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.