



A-LEVEL HISTORY

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

7042/1K
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General.

It was clear that most students had been well prepared for this paper, offering three well-developed answers. Depth of understanding, contextual knowledge and a sustained focus on the question were again decisive in determining a student's performance.

The different skills required for Section A and Section B remain one of the features of this paper. Some students respond particularly well to the structure and clear parameters of Section A and have developed appropriate techniques in response. Some of these students found the more open-ended nature of the essay questions more challenging. A high-level response to Q1 does not necessarily guarantee similar responses to Section B.

In Section B it was clear that many students were able to think effectively across a significant period of history, deploying knowledge carefully and selectively in response to the question. Students found all three essay questions accessible.

Section A, Q1

Students have refined their approach to this question in recent years and there are now very few attempts to compare the extracts. More able students identified key issues and sub-issues and evaluated the strength of the arguments with a range of contextual knowledge. There is still a significant group of students who simply describe or paraphrase the extract, sometimes summarising everything contained in it. This group often evaluated the extract either by testing its accuracy, which could have some merit, or by simply signifying agreement. This was a common approach for weaker students who found it easier to support the extracts than to challenge them. Some students have successfully learned to use the contextual knowledge contained within the extracts as a support for evaluation. These responses can sometimes appear to show a higher level of evaluation without actually introducing any original contextual knowledge. Very few students commented on the limitations of the extracts.

In respect of Extract A, essentially narrative with references to the actions of four US presidents, some students found it difficult to identify precisely what the key issues were. Some argued that it was Eisenhower who set the direction of US policy. Others argued that the extract identified Nixon as being responsible for the escalation of the war. Many queried Johnson's 'desire for peace'. In Extract B some of the best answers argued that the common theme was simply that US policy was aggressive and imperialist from 1956 to 1972. Many students were uncertain what was agreed at Geneva and therefore tended to underplay this part of the extract. There was some well-developed discussion as to whether US actions were 'imperial aggression' or whether they were simply examples of containment in practice. Most students argued that the two key issues in Extract C were the fear of provoking China and the fear of communist domination in southeast Asia. In both cases students were often able to show evidence to suggest that these fears were justified.

Section B, Q2

This was a popular question offering students the opportunity in many cases to show wide-ranging knowledge and understanding. The phrasing of the question ensured that most responses were balanced, drawing attention to factors on both sides of the argument. Many students wrote with enthusiasm and knowledge on familiar topics – railways, immigration, robber barons/ big business as well as westward expansion. The best answers focused on how the interplay of these factors facilitated economic growth. They also recognised that the West presented severe challenges, including one vivid account of the 'Big Die Up' of 1886/7. Weaker answers, although showing knowledge, sometimes presented their material in the form of a list and made little effort to explain the relative significance of each of the different factors.

Section B, Q3

The main focus of most answers was on factors which increased division in the USA. Students found it much harder to identify factors which brought people together and reduced division. Some students simply ignored this aspect and wrote a largely one-sided essay. Most answers considered the position of African- Americans and the challenges brought about by immigration as key factors in furthering division. Students were well informed on both these issues, allowing even weaker students the opportunity to show some relevant knowledge. Some students wrote extensively on the experiences of African- Americans without linking it clearly to the question. Higher level answers went further to include issues raised by temperance/prohibition, by women's suffrage, anti-communist sentiment and by industrial conflict. Students who did focus on unifying factors tended to point to progressivism, to women's suffrage and to the First World War as examples. Some drew attention to the fact that, despite continued discrimination, African-Americans did make some progress in certain fields.

Section B, Q4.

Most students who attempted Q4 had, at least, a reasonable understanding of the issues raised by the question, including an awareness of how Republicans and Democrats had differences of approach. Students accepted that Republican presidents on principle were suspicious of any extended role for the federal government in domestic politics. Material on Harding and Coolidge emphasised their dislike of government intervention but tended to be short on detail. Material on Roosevelt was often well developed with detailed support. Most students accepted that Hoover was reluctantly forced by circumstances into some policies which ran counter to his natural political instincts. The most able students emphasised the unprecedented severity of the Depression as the reason for this and also for opening the door to Roosevelt's New Deal. A few students sought to distinguish between areas of government policy – eg economic and social - and argued that governments approached these with differing attitudes in respect of intervention. Overall students responded well to this question, although some answers were quite brief.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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