



A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/2Q The American Dream: reality and illusion, 1945 - 1980
Report on the Examination

7042/2Q
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General

This year marked the return to pre-covid conditions, in which students and centres were not provided with any advance information. Inevitably, this meant that compared to last year some students found the paper more challenging, but there was still plenty of high level responses for each question. As in previous years, the source question proved the most challenging aspect of the paper.

Students continue to be well versed in deploying structured responses, focusing on content, context and provenance when responding to question 01. Students still need to focus on the core value of the source for the issue in question and avoid overly focusing on more niche aspects of provenance and/or content. For 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. Students balanced their time appropriately between the source question and the two essay responses with only limited examples of excessively long source responses (despite it only being worth five more marks) and undeveloped essay questions.

Question 01

Despite the dates of this question being from the end of the specification, the sources selected were designed to assess the extent of progress African Americans by the end of the period in a range of thematic areas, mainly political, social and economic. The majority of students recognised this focus on change and continuity. The structure of most responses was logical and clearly examined different areas of their value related to 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 the question.

The most effective responses were the ones which addressed the core value of the source for the issue in the question, before then going on to demonstrate understanding of this this eg source C is valuable for demonstrating continuing social & economic issues faced by African Americans. There was less of an issue with students looking at the sources in a binary way 'it is valuable because/it is not valuable because', but some students were still overly dismissive of a source's value because of its perceived limitations. An example of this was source A, in which some students assertively claimed it was 'biased' against the Republicans, but missed that it was a report of Jackson's speech to the Republican Party without any clear agenda of its own. The stronger responses were able to consider the wider value of each source taking into consideration any potential limitations as part of its evaluation.

Generally, the students understood and engaged well with the three sources. This was especially the case with source C, as many recognised its value as a non-partisan factual account highlighting ongoing social and economic issues. For source A, there was strong contextual knowledge present in many responses, particularly of political progress made by African Americans since the Civil Rights Era but also the lack of legislation under Carter. Comments on provenance tended to be weaker, however, with some students misunderstanding the nature of the report or the purpose of Jackson's speech. Students did recognise that source B highlighted that there was ongoing resistance to African American rights with the third era of the Ku Klux Klan. There was some misunderstanding around this, however, especially regarding the source's disbelieving nature of this. Some students also overly-exaggerated the influence the KKK had in this era, given that they remained a relatively niche group and Reagan openly rejected their ideas (as highlighted in the source).

Source questions remain a challenge for students. Centres are deploying effective strategies to tackle these, but combining the sources different elements to recognise its core value for the issue in question is the key to success.

Question 02

This was the most popular question and offered students a broad range of topics to write on. Students demonstrated good knowledge of the topic, drawing upon a wide range of relevant evidence concerning economic and other issues in the first three years of Truman's presidency. Many responses demonstrated understanding of economic issues, including inflation, transition from a wartime to peace time economy and employment. Most were able to contrast the importance of this problem against others such as relations with the Soviets, civil rights issues and political problems.

The stronger responses addressed economic issues domestically (post-war issues) and abroad, while demonstrating how these linked into other problems (such as strikes and containment of communism in Eastern Europe). The majority of students had plenty of material to draw upon from 1945-1948, but a minority drew upon material from outside of this, especially in foreign policy (Korean War, 'fall' of China and the end of the Berlin Blockade). The issue of domestic fear of communism was relevant to this question, but not if the students overly-focused on McCarthyism which is generally regarded to have begun with his Wheeling speech in February 1950.

Question 03

The Kennedy question was the second most popular essay response. The majority of students were able to draw upon a range of relevant economic and social policies, providing a balanced assessment of their successes and failures. Prominent among these were his 'New Frontier' policies, such as increasing the minimum wage, tax cuts, the Equal Pay Act and promoting the civil rights agenda. Most students recognised that Kennedy's achievements were limited by hostility from Congress (such as his Civil Rights Bill and Medicare) and the shortness of his administration. Like question 2, the strongest responses recognised how these policies intertwined and provided clear judgements on the extent of their success.

Some students provided a more conceptual understanding of Kennedy's aims and policies, sometimes struggling with specifics to substantiate their arguments. A minority of students also tried to shoehorn foreign policy events into the question (including the ever popular Cuban Missile Crisis), despite this clearly being irrelevant to the question's focus. Weaker responses for this question focused heavily on civil rights, with some providing more descriptive accounts of events such as the Freedom Rides and the March on Washington.

Question 04

The Kissinger question was the least popular essay response, but there were still a number of high quality answers produced. Most students recognised the question was based on the traditional Nixon vs Kissinger importance debate in foreign policy, though the time period also extended into Ford's presidency which some students did not appreciate. An answer which did not address the time period 1974-6 could not be judged to have displayed knowledge of the full demands of the question, therefore could not be awarded level five. There was a good understanding demonstrated of Kissinger's role in Vietnam, relations with China and the USSR along with events in Latin America (though weaker answers tended to omit this). Most students were able to provide evidence of his role in these areas, along with contrasting this against Nixon's own actions and judging ultimately who was the more important. The strongest responses were also those who addressed the key term 'direction' of US foreign policy and ensured they covered the dates in

question, not just focusing solely on Kissinger's role under the Nixon administration. Weaker responses provided more of a description of Kissinger's actions, mainly focusing on Vietnam. A minority did not provide any challenge to the question, focusing solely on Kissinger.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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